Executive Summary by

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Sustainable educational development of Public Administration

via online platform

Sustainable development has been intensely debated for more than twenty years but real progress of our societies to become more sustainable is very slow (Baumgartner, 2011, p.783). Luckily, education is such a field where the idea of a sustainable development is not only a rapidly spread one (Martin and Samels, 2012), but it tends to embrace specialists of various spheres. Since intensification of scientific and technical progress and globalization trigger revolutionary changes in all spheres of public life (Voluntary National Review, 2017, p.4), sustainable development has also affected great number of those who work in Public Administration. These are mostly people with MA in such fields as economics (from the Ministry of Economic Development), biology, ecology, etc. (from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural resources), law (from the Ministry of Justice and from the Supreme Court) and others who seek to get additional degree or non-degree education in governmental and municipal administration offered by the Professional Development Institute of Senior Public Servants.

Professional Development Institute as an integral structure of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan was one of the first country's state Academy to offer a wide range of courses to people working in Public Administration sphere. Each course is delivered in a face-to-face format and takes place a couple of times per year. The maximum number of attendees is thirty (some of them coming from regions) who are mostly interested in such disciplines/lectures as public administration, economics, administration of sustainable development, migration, ecological issues, multiculturalism, etc.

Depending on the form of education, the duration of each course may vary from several days to a month per session, each course lasting within 6 hours per day. However, recently, in order to facilitate the access of the listeners to the lectures, particularly those who have to commute to the city, the academy has implemented online based education which exempts participants from physical attendance. It is a known fact that today we can face a huge number of online learning platforms that allow participants to connect the virtual class from any place. Among such platforms are Moodle, Blackboard, Cornerstone, Edmodo, eFront and many others which are mostly operated by SCORM packages and follow the LMS packaging standards (Cast, 2012; Blackboard, 2016). Due to these innovations in teaching, we have implemented a pilot project among a group of participants who had to join the online sessions from their work places and homes. We have addressed to an eFront online learning platform which is easily accessible and simple in use. The program offers a flexible approach to learning and includes such components as eFront classroom training, online training and on-site training. To conduct a pilot project, we involved 75 participants who had to connect their classes on virtual bases, listening to online lectures, implementing online homework and participating in virtual debates and discussions.

To understand how the project worked and whether we should totally redirect our sustainable development courses to online platforms, a number of studies have been conducted. First of all, to obtain a qualitative data, we administered several observations to see if we have a hundred percent attendance for online classes, and if the participants are active enough to be involved into virtual discussions and debates. That is, the course instructor was responsible for taking record on the number of people who appeared online, and the frequency of questions asked during the session. Also, we needed to study what our participants think in terms of the use of online platform in sense of their personal growth and development. Moreover, the main target of the study was understanding of the usability of online learning among the course

attendees. For this, we conducted a survey that has been distributed among seventy-five participants who took part in the pilot project within the months of October and November 2018. Luckily, we had sixty-nine respondents who answered the survey questions and introduced their suggestions and comments on improvement of the existing problems that they faced during the pilot project. The questions were designed to figure out whether we should apply online courses more widely or if we should preserve the old method of face-to-face classes. Among the most important questions were: How much time do respondents spend to come to a face-to-face class; what the advantages and disadvantages of a face-to-face class are; what are the ways students get materials; what are the advantages and disadvantages of an online class, and others.

According to the results obtained, more than 43% of the respondents claim that it takes more than an hour to come to the class. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of the participants who work in the field of Public Service commute to the city. For other 36% it is between 30 to 60 minutes to come to the class. Yet, many respondents appreciate face-to-face classes for having opportunity to meet new people (32%), to be able to make new contacts and create interaction in the class (26%). Moreover, the majority of respondents (24.6%) claim that they are accustomed to face-to-face classes. However, face-to-face classes are said to have a number of disadvantages; lack of flexibility (45.6%) and long distance (29.4%) being a forefront issues. In contrast, online classes are more flexible: students get a quick access to online class (40.6%), they do not waste time on roads (62.3%), they can easily get materials online (45.5%) and finally, it is often possible to record the classes and watch (26.1%) them again; yet not all instructors record their classes. The only concern of the majority of respondents is lack of face-to-face interaction with their teachers and mates, as well as inability to make new connections with people. Due to this, in average, the pilot project is weighted as four out of five, where the major recommendations for improvements are the amelioration of

Wi-Fi connection in some regions (44%), regular class recordings which will make it possible to revisit the lectures (21.4%), having an explanatory course on how to deal with the program before the actual course starts (32.6%). The results of the observation demonstrate that the majority of students do attend online classes from any place they are, however they feel difficulty in asking questions since most of them are not familiar with the program (platform). During the observations, it became clear that participants need a face-to-face introductory course which can later be followed by an online lecturing. Turning to the exam questions, in order to provide clarity and transparency of the exam, many respondents believe that exams should be conducted on a face-to-face basis.

In light of this, we can conclude, that this pilot project was a good attempt to improve and to develop the standards of the classes offered to civil servants who seek to pursue their education. The results demonstrate that there is a number of reasons to have a slow move from a face-to-face class to a purely online class, using an intermediary type of lesson, which is called a blended class. This will allow to consider the ways to improve the problems existing in online classes (for instance, improving the connection, providing an introductory course so that the participants do not feel difficulty in using the program and to provide synchronous classes to listeners). Finally, the pilot project makes it possible to consider new and wider ranges of course delivery to Public Administration specialists.

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OUTLINE

➢ General background

➢ The problem

➢ Methodology: Data collection

                 Participants

                 Materials

➢ Results

➢ Suggestions

➢ General Conclusion
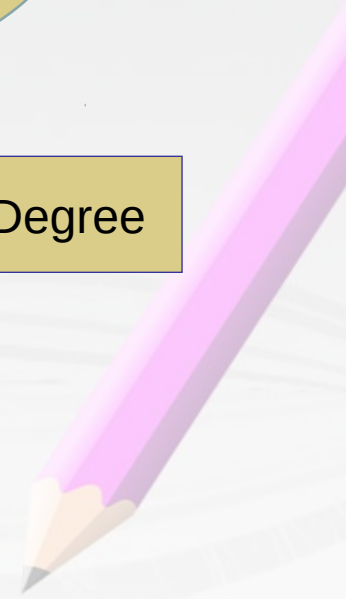
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General Background

- "Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations General Assembly, 1987, 43)

- "Education is such a field where the idea of a sustainable development is a rapidly spread one" (Martin and Samels, 2012)
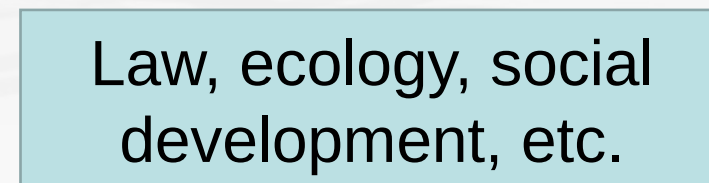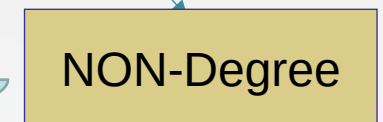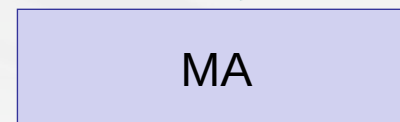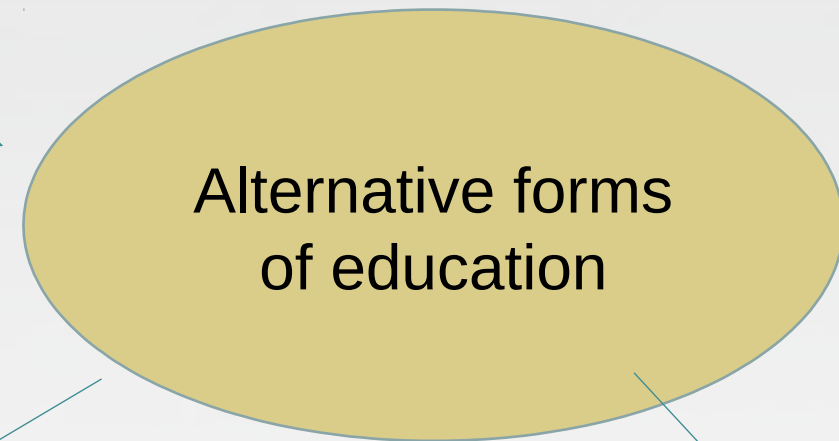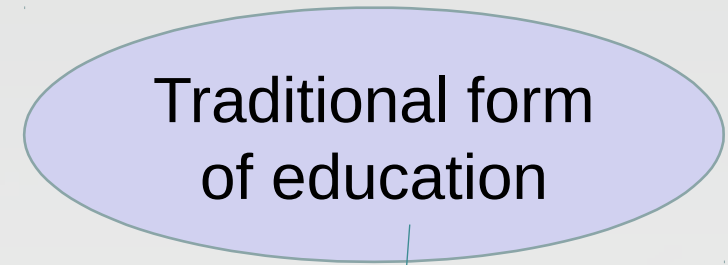
PROBLEMs

- Long distance
- Constant Leave from a work place
- Non-flexible timetable
- Back-to-back classes
- Accommodation in city
- Financial Difficulties

PILOT PROJECT

2016-2018

E-Front
&
True Conf
Platforms

SCORM Package

Main Questions

- What is the attendance and participation percentage/rate in online class?

- What challenges do learners have in an online class?

- Can we totally move to a distant (online) learning, if yes why, if not why?

Methodology

Qualitative Data

October & November 2018

Observation: Moderator/teacher records participation and attendance

Survey
Google Forms
12 questions
69/75 respondents

Results

- Observation:

Attendance:	100%	Each learner had his status ON each class
Participation:	21%	A small number of students was recorded to ask and answer questions, write comments in chat, participate in online blogs and forums.
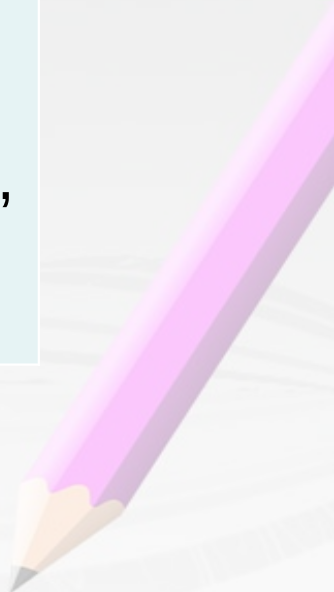
Results

| Time spent to come to a face to face class	More than an hour	Between 30-60 min	Less than 30 min
	43.5%	36.2%	15.9%

What do you like about face-to-face classes?	
Students can interrupt the instructor and ask questions	31.9%
It is easy to take notes	26.1%
Students are more accustomed to it	24.6%
Students make new contacts	15.9%

| What are the advantages of the classes?		
	Face-to-face	**Online**
It is quick to access the class	28%	**89%**
The schedule is flexible	16%	**73%**
It provides interaction between people	**89%**	12%
You can get new contacts	**90%**	16%
You can revisit the class	7%	**63%**
You don't waste time on roads	6%	**91%**

What are the disadvantages of these classes?		
	Face-to-face	Online
It takes a lot of time to access the class	V	
The instructors often miss the class	V	
No possibility to repeat the class	V	
The connection is poor		V
Lack of face-to-face interaction		V
Difficulty in using technology		V
No introductory course		V
Difficulty to make new contacts		V
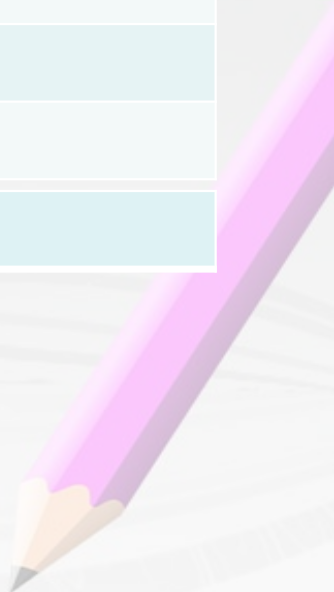
How do you normally get materials?

Face-to-face		Online	
Library	36.4%	By mail	42%
Take notes	54%	On platform	45.5%
Search online	11.6%	Search online	12.1%

Rate the online classes using 5-point scale

3.80%	3.60%	36.40%	27.90%	28.30%
1	2	3	4	5
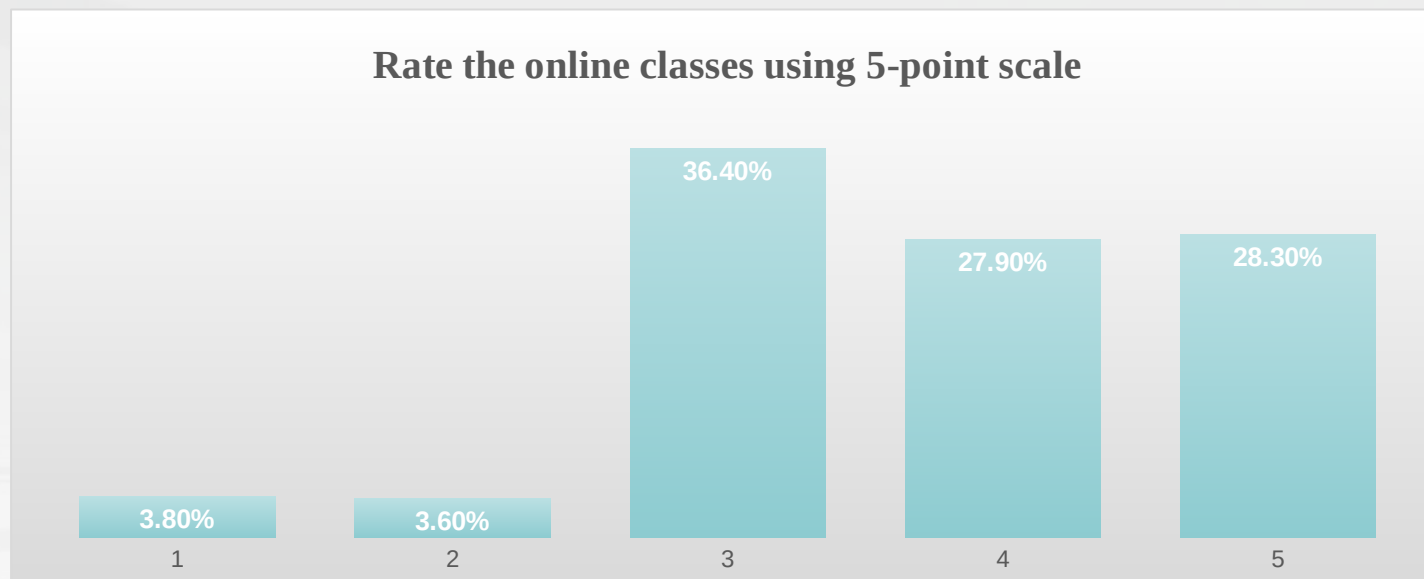
Suggestions and General Conclusion

- Improve Wi-Fi connection in some regions;
- To do regular class recordings which will make it possible to revisit the lectures;
- To have an explanatory course on how to deal with the program before the actual course starts;
- In order to provide clarity and transparency of the exam, many respondents believe that exams should be conducted on a face-to-face basis.

References

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Thanks for your attention!