

УДК 378.018.43:37.012

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MODERN CHALLENGES IN DISTANCE LEARNING PROCESS

Distance learning (also called e-learning) has existed as one of the educational techniques for more than half a century while new technologies were being added to its list of possible resources for conducting the process. However, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 and worldwide pandemic this way of studying shifted from extra and optional to the only one available, and all the system of education had to cope with the challenge and adjust to the new learning environment.

*The **article's purpose** is to outline the main problems experienced by both learners and teachers in the Ukrainian system of higher education during the process of adapting to the distance learning, paying special attention to the attitude, opinions, evaluation and self-evaluation of students, their parents and teachers.*

*The **methodology** used for this work is the systematic analysis of the informational sources dedicated to the problems of distance learning, and the experiment conducted with the help of students, parents and teachers of National University of Urban Economy named after O. M. Beketov in Kharkiv, Ukraine. The people involved in the study took part in an anonymous survey answering the questions about their own experience of distance learning.*

*The **scientific novelty** is connected with the way the survey was conducted. Its purpose was to ask all the three sides of the studying process, as parents also play an important role in it even while higher education, especially if they signed a contract with the university and have to pay for it. The survey was aimed at gathering and counting the opinions, as well as evaluating the progress.*

*As for the **conclusions**, the results of the survey showed that, in spite of the difficulties and negative attitude in the beginning, all the participants of the learning process gradually get used to the distance learning, though they are not willing to have the traditional studying process fully substituted with it. It made the studying more accessible for students from remote places and allowed them to save energy for working on their assignments. The teachers mostly saw it as a chance to try some new methods and approaches and to improve their qualification. However, the main problem lies in the parents' attitude, as the majority of them are dissatisfied with such a way of studying and think the students could get better results in the classroom.*

Keywords: distance learning, e-learning, distance learning issues.

The actuality of work is closely connected with the situation of the educational process worldwide, as due to the global pandemic of Covid-19 started in China in 2019, distance learning has become not simply a choice, but an obligatory form of studying. Distance learning, also called e-learning, is a trend in education that has existed since the middle of the twentieth century; however, recent changes have sharpened all the issues of this process and added modern challenges to cope with. In other words, the outbreak of the disease caused the so-called «emergency remote teaching» [3, 5]. It is impossible to continue proper education without the deep analysis of changes.

The analysis of recent surveys and publication showed a growing demand for finding solutions to these modern problems. Traditionally, the education system of Ukraine relies on a face-to-face studying process, and the swift shift to an online format was closely connected with the lack of infrastructure, technical difficulties and inability to instantly adjust to the new digital environment.

The aim of the study is to outline the problems faced by students during the distance learning, so that both teachers and students become aware of the possible drawbacks, and spend more time trying to avoid the problems listed in the work.

The methodology is connected with two important points. First, the analysis of already existing literature is aimed to consider the condition of distance learning both in Ukraine and in the world. However, the main

method is connected with the survey conducted with several groups of students of different ages. The results of the experiment are used for extracting the most problematic moments and making statistics.

The scientific novelty of this work is in the fact that the opinions of students, teachers and parents are counted to create a complete picture of how the education techniques look nowadays and whether they are effective enough to cope with the tasks they are made for.

Study results. Distant learning, which could be referred to as e-learning, is an integration of communication technologies and learning tools aimed at remote teaching. This process started with the usage of video cassettes for military training during the Second World War, especially in the army of the United States, and proved to be an efficient method despite the lack of teacher-student communication [6, 2]. Nowadays this could include various multimedia, and the student is no longer isolated from other students or a teacher, as different platforms and applications for transmitting messages, audio and video signals are available. However, sometimes the direct contact between a learner and a teacher is also not established, as the feedback and commentaries are given in the forms of charts, evaluation tables or reviews substituting the real time communication.

Despite all the changes which happened to the technical side of the issue, the main principles and aims of distance studying remained unchangeable. They coincide with the principles of traditional education, so the difference between the two methods is only about the technical side of education organization.

These principles include the following:

- the principle of consistency needed to for continuous process of learning, that is to create a full picture of the studying material for a student;
- the principle of consciousness expressed through correct performances, positive attitude of the students and their interest to the topic studying [1,180];
- the principle of accessibility which refers to counting the special needs and differences of the students, such as age, cognitive abilities, and moving from simple to complex concepts [2, 24];
- other principles like the mixture of education and self-education, learner-centered approach, block-module system of learning organization etc.

However, it should be noted that distant learning is not considered to be an innovative trend in the developed countries; it is only one of the widely used methods rather than some exclusive technique, and it is often integrated in the usual studying process. It is usually viewed as a tool to make education more democratic [5, 10]. Firstly, it gives the access to the proper education for all the learners worldwide, not depending on their geographical positions, as all they need is the access to communications. The second point is the variety of courses, subjects and curriculums the students are able to choose judging by their interests and aptitudes. The third idea is closely connected with the principle of accessibility of education; the distance format of learning enables the students to take an active part in studying no matter what limitations they encounter during the traditional education process.

Due to the situation with the pandemic, there is hardly any country not affected with the problem of urgent implementation of the distance learning as a substitution of the traditional classroom process. It was estimated by UNESCO that in March 2020 more than 1.5 billion people in 165 could not attend the lessons in the traditional way because of the dangerous situation [7, 1].

The recent surveys showed that 44 and a half percent of Ukraine university teachers were fully aware of the methods and approaches needed for distant learning; others had to study the issue from the basic points. Moreover, only half of the universities of Ukraine paid proper attention to the organization of the learning process [4, 137]. Both teachers and learners sometimes experienced difficulties with Internet connection, which is why the principle of sustainability was violated.

Several groups of students from Kharkiv National University of Urban Economy named after O. M. Beketov were asked to fill in a questionnaire about the impact of distance learning on their academic progress. To make the results more consistent, they were also asked to talk about this with their parents and present their opinions. In the end, the answers of the teachers were added to create a full picture of the studying process during the quarantine. The participants were able to write the answers anonymously, so no one could judge them concerning their opinions: they only had to establish their status as «student», «parent» or «teacher».

Overall, 82 people took part in the survey:

- 32 second year students, 31 first year students and 10 fourth year students from different specialties, all studying full-time;
- 25 parents of the given students;
- 7 university teachers.

The results of the survey could not be named homogenous, as they vary greatly because of the high degree of subjectivity in answers. Overall, 70% of students could say that they were satisfied with the distance format of learning, but they needed time to get used to it. However, the situation with parents and teachers was completely different: over 50% of them were not as content with this approach as the students, but eventually adapted. They understand the importance of this approach due to the situation worldwide, but said they would prefer to work within the traditional system of education and use distance learning only as an extra opportunity.

While taking part in the survey, 96% of students said their teachers paid enough attention to the process of studying. They not only established connection with the students via such applications as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, allowing the students take part in seminars and interactive lectures in the live format, but also answered their questions in different messengers like Telegram or Viber in case the students had some difficulties or they missed the lesson due to some circumstances and then wanted to recollect the material. The remaining 4% are the teachers whose subjects are not connected directly with the main profile of the group (e. g. Philosophy for the students-philologists); they had problems with systematic lessons or preparing the tasks in time concerning the total mark for the module, and were not so eager in consultations online.

As for the teachers, they said it was both challenging and educational for them to prepare for such double periods. About 66% said they needed more time for getting ready, as they were trying to either change the structure or find the technical solutions for specific kinds of tasks, like working in groups or pairs. 75% of respondents stated that distant learning became a perfect time for self-education necessary for finding the best ways and methods for studying. They often turned to the experience of foreign colleagues who had more practice in this type of learning. 50% of the teachers took part in online seminars dedicated to the modern issues of e-learning and shared their thoughts with people from other cities of Ukraine.

The most problematic aspect, according to the survey, is connected with the time management and general changes in daily routines. Almost 100% of students found it very convenient to get up later than usual and not to spend time on public transport to get to the university. The time saved for the round trip was used to get more sleep in the morning, thus being more refreshed and ready to work. About 43% of students tried to wake up at least twenty minutes before the start of the lesson to finish their morning routines, and the other half got up a few minutes before the start doing everything during the first break or sometimes even during the double period, simultaneously with the process of studying. The same reaction is connected to the end of their studying – the students did not need to waste time going home, and this gave them more energy to spend on the studying process. To sum up, the students generally found this experience time-saving and were satisfied with the opportunity to use these extra hours for learning and relaxing after the academic work.

The main drawback with distance learning and time management is closely linked with parents and their relations. About 36% of students said they were occasionally interrupted while studying and asked to help with household chores or look after younger siblings. It especially concerns the older generation, e. g. grandparents and those parents whose children are late ones, because mostly do not see working and learning from home as a job, but rather as some kind of entertainment and the way to pretend that someone is busy. 12% of them had serious arguments because this kind of education was considered «not serious enough» for the university students. This case showed that a lot of people from older generations are still not used to the process of digitization happening in different spheres of life.

Only about 25% of students experienced serious technical difficulties because of the connection to the Internet. Among them were those who live outside the city, especially in the lowlands areas (like Zolochivskiyi district of Kharkiv region). About 17% of students sometimes could not take part in the double period or listen to the lecture because of the Internet providers' issues which they could not affect in any case, but these problems were temporary and usually took about an hour or two. The latter problem sometimes occurred with teachers, though the majority of them tried to find another gap for having the lesson with a group or, if it was impossible to fit it into the schedule, gave the task for an individual work to catch in with the curriculum.

Meanwhile, the parents of those students who have two or more children engaged in the education process (either at school or at the university) complained about the inability to create proper conditions for studying. The space was often not enough for everyone to find their quiet corner for a lesson, because all the studying process happened at the same time. Sometimes younger siblings running around were a great distraction, as kindergarten also did not work properly, or worked for limited hours. About 20% of students admitted they had to go outside when the weather was warm enough, or to a cheap café nearby to be able to listen to the lecture in a convenient way. Although all the children in such families used their own mobile telephones, it was not always comfortable to look at such small screens, especially if the books or methodical recommendations also were in digital format. Only 34% of families had personal tablet PCs or notebooks for each child to study with. About 75% of parents were worried about the inappropriate time their children spent looking at the screen because of the possible problems with eyesight. They all noticed the occasional tiredness and redness of their eyes and tried to restrict the time with gadgets spent for the entertainment, but not the learning.

Another big problem of distant education is closely connected with the general situation during the pandemic, which is the necessity to stay at home. The majority of the respondents from all the three groups said that it was quite stressful being in the same unchangeable environment day after day, especially when the weather got warmer. The students missed the opportunity to speak with other people from their group, and teachers said that sometimes they felt trapped near the computer, as they had to work even longer hours answering the students' questions in different messengers during the day or checking the tasks done.

The next complaint mostly concerns the parents. They were generally not satisfied with the ability of students to stay focused on learning. While taking part in traditional classroom learning, they didn't have so many things to be distracted with, such as doing something simultaneously when the lecture is going on, like

watching videos or playing computer games. This factor caused the withdrawal of attention, and the information was not processed properly; some important details could be lost, as students tend to follow only the gist. However, about one third of students and teachers had difficulties with using mostly audial information during the seminars because they could not have proper eye contact, and that also distracted them from being focused.

The last and the most important issues were dedicated to self-assessment. Only 14% of students mentioned that their general academic progress became better during the time of distance learning. They mostly thought it happened because they managed to save the time needed for transportation and work in a comfortable atmosphere. About 45% said their progress was not different from the one they could get in the classroom, as the activities were almost the same, and the only thing that changed was the format. The rest of the students thought that their learning process became not as deep and complex as it was before, and they could have achieved better results. The position of the teachers is different, though. Almost all of the respondents said they would like to improve their results because they were not trained properly to work at 100% capacity from the very beginning. Generally, it was a challenging experience, and they all agree that they became more skilled in using digital methods of teaching than they had been before. Nevertheless, the majority of parents hope that the situation will change in the near time, as they do not consider this type of education to be effective and want more real life practice and communication for their children.

Conclusion. The unstable situation in the world created due to the spreading of Covid-19 has changed many aspects of our everyday life, including the system of education. A lot of people involved in the academic process were not completely ready for changing the format of their work, yet they made enormous efforts to adapt to the new standards and use this as a chance to upgrade their qualification.

During this period of time both teachers and students had similar difficulties, such as problems with the Internet connection, lack of personal contact and visual stimulus, the need to upgrade their time management skills and dealing with stress caused by an unchangeable working environment. Overall, the majority of people evaluated their work as good enough to think they coped with the situation on a sufficient level.

However, the survey conducted with the parents showed that lots of people nowadays still do not treat the forms of distance work and studying as decent, because they are not used to such conditions and are unconsciously stuck to the outdated stereotypical opinions about them. What is more, these opinions could be transmitted further to the younger generations, preventing them from learning to use this instrument in their future. This indicates that we should focus more on studying the reasons for such a reluctant attitude towards different forms of distance learning.

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СУЧАСНІ ТРУДНОЩІ У ДИСТАНЦІЙНОМУ НАВЧАННІ

Дистанційне навчання (також назване електронним навчанням) існувало як одна з освітніх методик понад півстоліття, а нові технології додавалися до його переліку можливих ресурсів для проведення цього процесу. Однак, через спалах Covid-19 та пандемію у всьому світі, цей спосіб навчання перейшов із категорії додаткового та факультативного до єдиного доступного, і всій системі освіти довелося боротися з викликом та пристосуватися до нового навчального середовища.

Метою статті є окреслити основні проблеми, з якими стикаються як студенти, так і викладачі в українській системі вищої освіти в процесі адаптації до дистанційного навчання, звернувши особливу увагу на ставлення, думки, оцінку та самооцінку студентів, їхніх батьків та вчителів.

Методологія, використана для даної роботи, – це систематичний аналіз інформаційних джерел, присвячених проблемам дистанційного навчання, та експеримент, проведений за допомогою студентів, батьків та викладачів Національного університету міського господарства ім. О. М. Бекєтова у Харкові, Україна. Учасники дослідження взяли участь в анонімному опитуванні, відповідаючи на запитання про власний досвід дистанційного навчання.

Наукова новизна пов'язана зі способом проведення опитування. Його метою було запитати всі три сторони процесу навчання, оскільки батьки також відіграють у ньому важливу роль навіть під час отримання вищої освіти, особливо якщо вони підписали контракт з університетом і повинні оплачувати навчання. Метою опитування було зібрати та підрахувати думки, а також оцінити прогрес учнів та вчителів.

Щодо **висновків**, результати опитування показали, що, незважаючи на труднощі та негативне ставлення на початку дистанційного навчання, всі учасники навчального процесу поступово звикають до дистанційного навчання, хоча не бажають мати традиційне навчання. процес повністю замінений ним. Це зробило навчання доступнішим для студентів із віддалених місць та дозволило їм заощадити сили для виконання завдань. Здебільшого вчителі бачили в цьому можливість спробувати нові методи та підходи та підвищити свою кваліфікацію. Але головна проблема – у ставленні батьків, адже більшість із них незадоволені таким способом навчання і вважають, що учні могли б досягти кращих результатів, навчаючись у класі.

Ключові слова: дистанційне навчання, електронне навчання, проблеми дистанційного навчання.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 26.10.2021

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