

## Distance Education in the Framework of the Global Pandemic

The present article concerns the acceleration and enhancement of online learning due to the pandemic spreading throughout the world. Taking into account the technological development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the process of transition to distance learning, unfortunately, turned out to be not as smooth as it was predicted. Bringing out the main difficulties of the distance form of education the author sets certain solutions, highlights various ways of carrying out remote teaching and, finally, suggests ways to motivate reluctant learners to continue learning in a virtual environment and keep their engagement up.

**Key words:** distance learning, informational technologies, motivation, virtual environment.

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### Дистанційна освіта в умовах глобальної пандемії

Стаття присвячена прискоренню і вдосконаленню процесу формування онлайн-навчання в зв'язку з поширенням пандемії в усьому світі. Враховуючи технологічний розвиток 21 століття, процес переходу до дистанційного навчання, на жаль, виявився не таким простим, як прогнозувався. Встановивши основні труднощі дистанційної форми навчання, автор пропонує певні рішення, виділяє різні способи проведення дистанційного навчання і, нарешті, пропонує різноманітні методи для мотивації і підтримки студентів, які з небажанням продовжують навчання у віртуальному середовищі.

**Ключові слова:** віртуальне середовище, дистанційне навчання, інформаційні технології, мотивація.

## Introduction

In 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic the educational system all over the world faced with forced transition to distance education. Even the most conservative educational institutions had to start the transformation towards digital.

The **topicality** of this paper is conditioned by the fact that new trends in the world educational system may have great influence on the future of the educational system as one of the most important social institutions of each country. Distance learning is deemed to be the most effective alternative to allow students to continue their education under the conditions of geographic and time separation between students and instructors.

**The object** of the article is distance education, **the subject** of this paper is the group of factors that complicate and slow down the process of distance education development.

*Distance education* is a process of interactive interaction of the participants of the educational process with each other and with the learning environment through a variety of multimedia technologies. In other words, distance education (also called distance learning, online learning and e-learning) is a form of education in which the instructors and students are physically separated and the interaction is realized based on informational technologies.

Accordingly, **the aim** of this paper is to highlight the main problems that complicate and deteriorate online learning, and to reveal factors affecting student motivation in distance education.

Though distance education has many years' history, it is indisputable, that it has started developing rapidly in recent decades. It seemed online education had everything one needed (a wide range of Internet resources, e-books and e-magazines, online whiteboard etc.) and transformation to online form of teaching would bear no difficulty. But the reality revealed the unreadiness of the vast majority of educational institutions to face the challenge of the pandemic.

**The main problems** were as follows:

- the choice of the online course platform and the shift of traditional educational programs into self-paced ones;
- the insufficient computer literacy not only on the part of students but also that of instructors;
- the necessity of great motivation, as not every student succeeded in maintaining the desired pace of learning without outer control;
- the lack of communication, as within the frames of online education the communication among students and instructors was minimal or fully absent;
- the lack of practical knowledge (even the most modern technologies cannot replace "live" practice).

Highlighting the difficulties of the distance form of education, it is necessary to realize that a single unique educational and informational interactive environment must be created which will be constantly updated and adjusted to the specific needs of the educational process. It should include all kinds of electronic and online sources of information, such as virtual libraries and databases, electronic teaching aids, virtual laboratories and classrooms, online consultation services and other similar structures. It can be concluded that distance learning must be based on the creation of a unique complex of disciplines in an interactive form, the development of pedagogical and didactic-methodical aspects of distance learning and the training of instructors. The latter is considered one of the main ways to solve the problems of distance learning [1, p. 41].

In order to facilitate the process of online lesson organization several questions must be taken into account:

Before starting remote teaching one of the main questions of an instructor is to decide the method of delivering online lessons: if they will be in a form of

✓ *Real-time meetings (synchronous learning)*

It's a type of learning where all participants are "present" at the same time in a virtual classroom, they collaborate in real time (live presentations, instant messaging, live audio/video chat, etc). There must be a timetable. One of the most used tools of synchronous learning is webinar tools, such as Zoom, and the virtual classroom, such as Adobe Connect. In real-time meetings the

instructor has control over the meeting content, can explain the new materials, ask and receive questions from students. Hence, there is immediate feedback from participants.

The benefits of synchronous learning:

- interaction between participants;
- exchange of knowledge and experience between participants;
- real-time feedback for the instructor;
- training takes place on a fixed schedule.

✓ *Interactive teaching materials (asynchronous learning)*

It's a type of learning where all participants are not required to be together at the same time. There is no real-time interaction with other people. Mail correspondence, e-mail, video and audio recordings, print materials, voicemail – all these are asynchronous delivery technologies. To organize online trainings means to help students to deal with new information independently. Accordingly, strict instructions, recommendations and tips should be added to study materials.

The benefits of asynchronous learning:

- participants can learn in their own time and schedule;
- less work for instructors (recorded classes, messages, webinars);
- employees spend less time in a classroom during work hours.

✓ *Combination of methods mentioned above*

It's a type of learning where participants meet in a virtual classroom, collaborate in real time, the instructor explains the new topic, answers the questions and sets home assignment. Later on students work independently in their own time and schedule based on video and audio recordings, print materials, voicemails etc. Feedback from participants is also received via internet resources.

In fact, researchers find that when group-paced and self-paced learnings are blended, much better outcomes are achieved.

The next important question that the instructor faces is the educational planning process. On this stage one needs to answer the following questions:

- What learning outcomes are intended?
- How will these learning outcomes be achieved?
- How can students be supported to achieve them?
- What factors will show the goal is achieved?

Based on answers lesson schedule must be made up, which also includes information about the necessary teaching materials, the way of monitoring students' work and the deadline of feedback.

## **Factors affecting student motivation in distance education**

Students, used to traditional classes, may have hard time not having an instructor controlling their work. There are many factors that influence on students' involvement in remote learning process.

### ✓ *Making mistakes*

Fear of misunderstanding the topic and making mistakes keeps students from getting involved in the educational work. Elbert Hubbard mentioned: "The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one".

Facing various difficulties, making mistakes, asking questions, correcting them, getting feedback – all these are necessary components of learning process. As soon as students realize it, they deal with mistakes as integral part of development. If mistakes lead to the reduction of self-esteem, students start worrying about making mistakes and try to avoid to complete the assignment.

The main task of an instructor is to let student understand that when it is difficult, incomprehensible, there are many mistakes – all these are natural mode of learning, and the instructor and mates are for helping him to overcome those difficulties.

### ✓ *Confidence to cope with the work*

When students don't understand the essence of the task, in most cases it remains unfulfilled. That's why the instructor has to explain clearly what is demanded from them. Students must receive strict instructions, explanations and tips.

### ✓ *Self-Directed Learning*

To foster learning in online classes the instructor has to create students' self-learning skills, develop their independent cognitive activity, raise willingness and capacity to conduct their own education. It means the instructor's role is not limited merely by revealing the learning techniques, discussing the most difficult sections, highlighting typical mistakes that can occur when doing home assignments, but the instructor should also form a positive attitude towards self-education through the development of skills and abilities of doing independent work [2].

### ✓ *Autonomy*

Students need to have a certain degree of control over what must be done and how can be done. Choice grants a feeling of freedom. Students must have a possibility to choose assignments by difficulty degree, quantity, various ways of realizing them, and so on.

### ✓ *Positive relationships among students and the instructor*

It is especially important when it comes to virtual teaching when students really don't have to connect with the instructor if they don't want to!

✓ *Relatedness*

One of the main tasks of an instructor is to create necessary conditions for developing virtual teamwork among students, as students learn in groups and with each other more effectively than alone. Accordingly, self-learning cannot be a passive activity, on the contrary it is an active cognitive one and it is important for students to learn through social interaction.

✓ *Relevance*

The lesson must be observed by students as interesting and valuable to them and useful to their present lives, hopes and dreams for the future.

✓ *Feedback on assignments*

Supportive and constructive feedback from the instructor is highly appreciated, as it motivates students to move forward and of no less importance is the fact that students realize that somebody “cares”.

### **Mistakes which must be avoided**

Shifting to online teaching instructors need to avoid certain mistakes.

1. *Never transfer offline techniques to a remote form of teaching.* (Many instructors replicate traditional way of teaching with modern tools. However, distance learning requires different methods and methodologies to engage students).

2. *Do not jump from one service or platform to another one.* (Choose tools based on the goals and objectives. Assess them. Feel free to change tools if they don't help you to achieve your goals).

3. *Avoid using punitive measures.* (Temporarily they can make someone work, but for a long run period it is a poor strategy).

4. *Stop trying to control students.* (It is a waste of time, as there is 'google' at hand and mates in a group chat. Instead, think over qualitative assignments for the students, so that the factors mentioned above could help to fulfill them).

### **Conclusion**

What did global lockdown due to COVID-19 bring to all participants in the field of education? Obviously, it brought more experience that would be usefully implemented in the future rather than positive impressions. Undoubtedly, everyone gained invaluable experience in working in new conditions. Instructors improved their proficiency in distance learning tools and enriched the existing programs, students improved their self-study and self-discipline skills. Parents got the opportunity to participate in the educational process, understand what it was needed to pay attention to, and with the introduction of new distance initiatives they also got the opportunity to reconsider the prospects of receiving education even on the international level.

Today it's already clear that the global lockdown has changed the educational system forever. Obviously, the form of distance education needs serious changes and improvements. Great efforts must be put to establish conditions for all the participants of the educational process to be at ease. There are a lot of predictions on further development of the world system of education, but still most experts consider the combination of traditional and online forms of education to be the best method of teaching in Ukraine.

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