

Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Learning in Ukrainian Higher Education Institutions Under Martial Law

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Abstract- Since 2020, due to objective reasons (first the Covid-19 pandemic, then the war), many Ukrainian educational institutions have not been able to organize a systematic educational process in a face-to-face format. Educational institutions have to combine different forms of education in order to establish effective interaction and ensure high-quality acquisition of knowledge. In the conditions of quarantine restrictions, and later martial law in Ukraine, the distance form turned out to be the most optimal and safest option for organizing education. The article examines the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning based on a survey of applicants for a bachelor's degree who are studying in the specialty 012 Preschool Education at Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University. A total of 53 applicants who have been studying using distance learning technologies for 4 years were surveyed. The following questions were investigated: what difficulties did students encounter at the beginning of distance learning, how did they overcome them; dynamics of attitude towards distance learning (over four years of study); analyzed the difficulties (and psychological ones, in particular) that applicants faced, and how they solved them. The advantages of distance learning were the opportunity to spend more time with family, save time traveling to the university, mobility of learning (the ability to study anywhere at any time). Disadvantages: lack of "live" communication and technical problems that arose during distance learning. In the course of this study, we used the

following methods: theoretical: analysis of scientific sources to determine the state of research on the problem of organizing distance learning in Ukrainian and foreign higher education institutions. The synthesis, systematization and generalization of theoretical provisions of the problem were used; empirical: pedagogical observation of the organization of distance learning at the Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi of students of the specialty 012 Preschool Education, conversations with teachers of the Department of Preschool Education of this university, conversations with 4th-year students of the specialty 012 Preschool Education of full-time and correspondence studies. The survey lasted 8 days: from September 9 to 16, 2024. Participation in the online survey was voluntary. To increase the effectiveness of distance learning, it is recommended to increase the digital competence of teachers of higher education institutions in the use of various digital tools and a humanistic orientation to create a more comfortable environment. The features of using BYOD technology ("bring your own device") in conditions of distance learning are noted.

Keywords- distance learning, higher education, bachelor's degree applicants, master's degree applicants, problem-based approach, innovative BYOD technology.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Ukraine, distance learning has become widespread, starting in 2020, when there was a sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, martial law in Ukraine forced many educational institutions, and higher education institutions in particular, to remain on distance learning or switch to a blended format. Currently, the situation in Ukraine has not changed and this is a prerequisite for studying the features of organizing distance learning in higher education.

Discussions of the problems of organizing distance learning with colleagues at scientific seminars and conferences of various levels allow us to assert that the vast majority of teachers of higher education institutions in Ukraine were not technically and methodologically ready to implement such training. The findings of the study [8] indicate that as of 1999, there was no original research devoted to explaining or predicting phenomena related to distance learning, and second, although most studies show that distance learning courses are superior to classroom-based learning, the overall quality of the research is questionable, making the results inconclusive. The authors identified key research shortcomings including: (1) most studies do not control for extraneous variables and therefore cannot show cause and effect; (2) most studies do not use randomly selected subjects; (3) the validity and reliability of the instruments used to measure student outcomes and attitudes are questionable; and (4) many studies do not adequately control for the feelings and attitudes of students and instructors.

In subsequent years, scholars have sought ways to improve the effectiveness of online courses in higher education [3].

The problem of transitioning to distance learning has been faced by teachers in higher education institutions in various countries: India [1], Morocco [4], Albania, Italy, Morocco, Algeria [5], Turkey [7].

After the forced distance learning, scholars became interested in studying the experience of conducting such training to determine ways to increase its effectiveness. Recommendations were made at the teaching and technical levels, such as the need for technical support and training in the use of these tools, to improve and promote distance education in Morocco [4].

It is worth noting the researched technologies for increasing the efficiency of distance learning in higher education institutions - this is the use of artificial intelligence [6], understanding technological capabilities and theories of learning, especially constructive theory and theory of independent learning, communicative theory and theory of interaction in distance learning [7], developing a model of distance learning in a higher education institution [2] and equipping students with skills for safe use of the Internet [9].

Thus, a review of scientific sources indicates the prospects of distance learning, if it is based on new communications and will be an important factor in future strategies of higher education, on the one hand, and on the other - the need to systematically study the features of organizing such learning to increase its efficiency.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the course of this study, we used the following methods: theoretical: analysis of scientific sources to determine the state of research on the problem of organizing distance learning in Ukrainian and foreign higher education institutions. The synthesis, systematization and generalization of theoretical provisions of the problem were used; empirical: pedagogical observation of the organization of distance learning at the Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi of students of the specialty 012 Preschool Education, conversations with teachers of the Department of Preschool Education of this university, conversations with 4th-year students of the specialty 012 Preschool Education of full-time and correspondence studies.

The study was conducted from February to December 2024. 124 4th-year students of the full-time and correspondence studies of the Faculty of Preschool and Primary Education named after Valentyna Voloshyna of the specialty 012 "Preschool Education" of the Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi (Vinnytsia, Ukraine) participated in the questionnaire.

The survey lasted 8 days: from September 9 to 16, 2024. Participation in the online survey was voluntary.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An experimental study was conducted, the respondents of which were 124 4th-year applicants for a bachelor's degree in specialty 012 Preschool Education of the Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University, who study in the educational programs "Preschool Education. Primary Education", "Preschool Education. Speech Therapy" of full-time and part-time study.

We studied students' attitudes towards distance learning. Based on the opinions of students, we can more effectively make changes to the organization of distance learning.

The survey was conducted by students who had been studying remotely for 3.5 years.

The first question was: "What was your attitude to the news that you will be studying in a distance format? Neutral - 57, positive - 42, negative - 25,

As part of our study, it was interesting to find out whether students encountered difficulties at the beginning of distance learning in 2020. It is worth noting that in March 2020, the distance learning format at Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University was chosen due to the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The question to students was as follows: "What difficulties did you encounter at the beginning of distance learning?" We offered students to choose from the following options: technical support 64, insufficient level of digital skills 40, psychological discomfort from unusual learning conditions - 56, there were no difficulties - 8. Since in this question students could choose several options, the sum does not equal 100%. As we can see, the most difficulties for students were related to technical support. Eight students did not experience any difficulties. It was also interesting to find out whether students experienced difficulties during distance learning. Therefore, the next question was as follows: "Did you experience difficulties during distance learning?" Let's

consider the students' answers. The answer "yes, I had difficulties" was chosen by 41 students, "no" - 77 students, I had difficulties at the beginning of the distance format, and then I adapted - 4.

With the next question, we wanted to find out what difficulties the students had. Let's analyze the students' answers. Some students had difficulties related to health. They solved them with the help of treatment and sports. In our opinion, such a difficulty is not related to the distance learning format. Moreover, during distance learning it is even easier to solve health problems, since the teaching staff of the Department of Preschool Education of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University always helps students in such issues. One of the options is to record videos during lectures, practical, laboratory classes and place them in the virtual environment of Google Classroom. In this case, the student can familiarize himself with the theoretical material that was considered at the lecture. After watching the video of the practical lesson, the student has an idea of the form the lesson took, how the teacher evaluates the answers, what to emphasize in his answer. And, finally, the student can attach the completed assignment to Google Classroom without penalties.

Some students overcame minor technical difficulties on their own, while others turned to teachers.

Some students had difficulties because they had to go to work and it was difficult to combine study with work. In this, in our opinion, the distance learning format can be the solution to this problem. After all, as we have already noted above, a student can watch videos in the virtual environment of Google Classroom at a convenient time. And also add a completed task.

However, there was a difficulty that became a challenge for both students and teachers. We are talking about power outages. Due to martial law in Ukraine, there were power outages that continue today. This was noted by almost all students who were surveyed. The exceptions were students who were abroad. As evidenced by the analysis of the deadlines for submitting work by students to the virtual environment of Google Classroom, we noticed that students who studied responsibly systematically submitted their work. And students who were not conscientious about their studies during offline learning turned in their assignments in Google Classroom on time. Personal conversations with students confirmed the conclusion that problems with power outages are not the key to students' failure. Students noted that when there were problems with power outages and unstable Internet, they turned to the teacher.

The next question was: "Has your attitude towards the features of distance learning changed now, compared to the beginning?" yes - 88, no - 36.

The next question "What are the changes in attitude towards distance learning related to?" We offered students the following options: "during the study process, I acquired digital skills necessary for this type of study" - 78, "I learned to combine study with work, family, etc." - 14, "I feel a lack of "live" communication - 32. In response to this question, students were able to choose several options, so the sum will be different from 100%. In response to the next question, we asked students to indicate the advantages of distance learning

that occurred in their experience (you can choose several options). Students made the following choices: the opportunity to spend more time with their family - 96, saving time on traveling to the university - 104; the opportunity to simultaneously obtain another specialty - 8; the opportunity to work - 97; while abroad, I have the opportunity to study - 7; mobility of study (the opportunity to study anywhere at any time) - 112; opportunity to travel and study - 24. In answering this question, students were able to choose several options, so the sum will be different from 100%. As we can see, the following advantages are prioritized: mobility of study, spending more time with family, saving time on traveling to university. In this question, students were also asked to name their option. However, no such answers were recorded.

In the next question, we asked the students who took the survey to indicate the disadvantages of distance learning. The answers were as follows: lack of "live" communication - 72, difficulty in perceiving and mastering the material - 8; difficulty in performing practical and laboratory work - 6; problems in passing the test/exam online - 0; technical problems that may arise in the process of distance learning - 112. Thus, we can see that the main disadvantages of distance learning are seen by students as technical problems and lack of "live" communication.

As part of our study, we were interested in who students turned to for help when they had (or could have had) psychological difficulties in the process of distance learning. We offered the following options: to classmates - 48; to teachers (teacher) - 32, to a psychologist - 0; to relatives, friends - 56; I don't turn to anyone, I'm used to solving problems on my own - 42. As we can see, the students who took the survey prioritized their family and friends. And it was their family that they would turn to or did turn to for help in solving problems that occurred during distance learning. Another area of our research was the study of what digital tools teachers use in distance learning. What web resources did teachers use during distance learning? Google Classroom - 112; Google Meet - 120; Google it - 0; Google Drive - 64; All Google Apps - 17; Zoom - 113; LearningApps - 104; Miro - 32; Padlet - 71; Clasdojo - 0; Classtime - 112. Students were also offered their own option to answer this question. However, there were no such answers. In answering this question, students were able to choose several options, so the sum will differ from 100%. As we can see, teachers use applications such as Google Meet, Google Classroom, Zoom the most and do not use Clasdojo and Google it at all.

To understand what functions resources for distance learning should have, we asked students the following question: "Indicate the properties of digital resources, platforms that are necessary for distance learning?" Here are the students' answers: "Adaptability, convenience, accessibility, interactivity, diversity", "resources related to creating presentations, interactive games, educational and methodological resources with tests, interesting tasks", "it is important for me that resources provide the possibility of effective interaction, cooperation and exchange of information between participants in the educational process, as well as contain content that is interesting for children", "interactivity, flexibility and the ability to accept many participants", "participation and interactivity".

Finally, we asked students questions about the recommendations they would give to teachers of higher education institutions in organizing distance learning. Having analyzed the students' answers, we can combine them into two groups. The first group is wishes in the educational and methodological sphere. Among the recommendations, we note those that were encountered most often: "I would advise you to choose a platform for meetings well, so that it is convenient and understandable for everyone", "When explaining the material, create an additional presentation, or show photos, so that it is easier to remember", "conduct more interactive and practical exercises", "look for more interesting sites to make the lesson more interesting", "create a more flexible schedule so that you can spend less time at the computer", "use more modern technologies". The second group is psychological wishes. They included: "Pay more attention to the condition of those who are studying and your own; unite and contribute to building a friendly team; take into account the moral state of students; support when necessary, become a reliable shoulder for students; in educational work, take into account the current situation in the country", "be able to correctly combine loyalty and rigor, so as not to push students away, but to show authority". There were students who noted that they liked how distance learning was organized at the Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University

Thus, the empirical study conducted allowed us to identify the following features: students who took the questionnaire developed by us were only worried at the beginning of distance learning, and then solved the problems; during distance learning, they noticed the advantages of such learning (the opportunity to be at home with their family, not to spend money on traveling to the university and paying for housing, working, raising children), they consider the use of digital tools by teachers to be insufficient, they propose to diversify digital tools that would ensure interactivity, interaction between students and clarity.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In the article, the authors made an attempt to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. From the empirical research methods, a questionnaire was used for 4th-year bachelor's degree applicants studying in the specialty 012 Preschool Education at the Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University. The uniqueness of the study lies in the fact that the students who took the questionnaire have been studying in a distance format for 3.5 years. A total of 124 full-time and part-time students participated in the questionnaire. The study revealed more advantages of distance learning than disadvantages. The students considered the advantages to be the opportunity to be at home with their family, not to spend money on traveling to the university and paying for housing, to work, and to raise children. However, the quality of distance learning can be fully assessed during the final certification, where students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge over 4 years of study.

To increase students' interest in acquiring professional knowledge, according to the authors of this article, the use of a problem-based approach in teaching, the latest digital tools for interactivity, interaction between students and feedback from the teacher to students, and the use of BYOD technology will help.

The conducted research does not exhaust all aspects of the problem under study. Further research is required to study the impact on students' motivation to acquire knowledge and form competencies in a distance format.

Further scientific developments are required to study the formation of students' motivation for learning under the conditions of distance learning.

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