

MAIN CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF DISTANCE LEARNING FOR TEACHING DEVELOPING OF STUDENTS' SUPRA-PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

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Abstract: Interest in distance learning from the scientific and business communities is growing every day, especially during the introduction of quarantine due to the spread of coronavirus infection. When the transition to online learning became inevitable for everyone in a fairly short time teachers had to master not only educational platforms, but also a complete revision of the classes' structure and the approach to their training. In the article, the authors analyzed the results of a survey of 60 teachers in two Russian regions (Omsk and Yekaterinburg), who conduct classes in the field of "economics", "management", "personnel management". The survey was conducted at the very beginning of the introduction of the quarantine and the main goal was to assess how much teachers accept this transition to distance learning, what kind of help would be valuable for them, what they see as the main difficulties and challenges. The authors also share some thoughts about what supra-professional competences of students can be influenced by effectively constructed distance learning, setting the direction for further research.

Keywords: distance learning, teacher, digitalization, soft-skills, supra-professional competencies

JEL Code: A22, J23, J24, O15

Introduction

There is no doubt that the distance learning opens up new opportunities for education but it is also presents new challenges for teachers. If the teachers effectively use these opportunities and look for the ways how to emerge the challenges, it will help to increase the effectiveness of the development of students ' supra-professional competencies. When all the Russian universities had to begin training online in the conditions of isolation many teachers experienced a strong shock. The educational environment was quite uncertain before, but this uncertainty was increased during the quarantine and everybody realized that the higher education system would never be the same again. It is worth to stress that “the demands of the modern society are focused on preparing teachers, who will be ready to implement activities in the face of redundancy

of the educational environment, agility and adaptability of learning management as well as uncertainty of the educational situations they encounter. In our modern society, there appeared a demand for a proactive and self-directed teacher, able to determine and implement goals that go beyond the standard requirements” (Zhigalova, Kopus, 2018).

If we talk about the impact of distance learning on development of students' supra-professional competencies it can be concluded that it can help the teacher to focus on student's individual needs, and provide individualized support (Riabova, Pavlova, 2019). We are supposed that high-level knowledge of modern technologies by higher school teachers increases the level of understanding and quality of communication with students, allowing them to strengthen such supra-professional competence as digital literacy and communicative competence in the digital world. As Semenova, Vekilova, Korjova writes: “Today's (and tomorrow's) students are «digital natives», they're well knowledgeable in new technologies and fluent in skills” (Semenova, Vekilova, Korjova, 2019, p. 755). Distance educational technologies help to increase the independence of students, developing a communicative environment, mastering the latest information technologies (Shipunova, Mureyko, Serkova, Romanenko, 2016).

Some authors point out that teacher lack of experience of the design elements of the educational environment with the use of modern technology and distance learning formats (Al-Ansari, 2006; Trostinskaya, Pozdeeva, Evseeva, Tanova, 2019; Zhigalova, Kopus, 2018). One of the key question is to estimate the university teachers' psychological readiness to use distance learning technologies (Semenova, Vekilova, Korjova, 2019) as well as to identify of organizational, technical, technological, organizational and methodological aspects of the effective implementation of distance education (Bylieva, Lobatyuk, Rubtsova, 2018; McCarthy, & Murphy, 2010). Some authors have outlined the steps for the formation of psychological readiness to use distance learning technologies in teaching practice (Semenova, Vekilova, Korjova, 2019), others survey the influence of distance learning on total satisfaction of students with education (Liaw, 2008; Trostinskaya, Pozdeeva, Evseeva, Tanova, 2019), describe their experience in the implementation of massive open online courses in the traditional educational process (Razinkina, Kalmykova, Bakayev, 2018; Zheng et al., 2016), study the impact of online live streaming of lectures on student achievement and attendance (Cacault, María Paula and Hildebrand, Christian and Laurent-Lucchetti, Jeremy and Pellizzari, Michele, 2019).

In any case, it is obvious that distance learning technologies are being used more and more by universities, and the self-isolation regime is likely to accelerate this process. This will encourage to look for the answers to the questions about how to increase the teachers' competence to improve the effectiveness of distance learning, what methods should be used, how to

build a system of communication with students to contribute not only the increasing of their academic knowledge, but also the development of supra-professional competencies.

The purpose of this study is to identify the main challenges as well as opportunities for teaching in distance learning. There are several tasks are supposed to be solved:

1. To study the teachers' vision for the distance learning's challenges and opportunities.
2. To analyze the tools which teachers use in online classes.
3. The skills which can help teacher to be more effective in distance learning.

There are following research methods are used such as an online-survey and content analysis of official publications on the research topic.

1. Challenges and opportunities for teaching in distance learning

Leontyeva I. during the experiment “founded out the main barriers to the effective implementation of modern distance learning technologies in the university teaching and learning process: non-readiness of teachers and parents, the lack of necessary skills of applying the computer-based online learning systems, inability to interact with the faculty and teachers, the lack of sufficient academic advisors online” (Leontyeva I., 2018). In our research we decided to analyze the main challenges and opportunities of distance learning and the survey identified three main blocks:

1. Questions aimed at assessing the level of acceptance of changes related to distance learning.
2. The main difficulties that arise and the skills that teachers need to develop.
3. Questions about the quality of communication with students during distance learning.

1.1. The level of acceptance of changes related to distance learning

The tag cloud (Figure 1) obtained through the question "What are the three words that you associate with distance learning?" shows that the most popular associations are positive among them opportunity, development. Some association are about instruments or platform used in distance learning such as zoom, teams, whats'up etc. The average value of subjective acceptance of distance learning by teachers on a 10-point scale (where 10 points is the maximum acceptance) turned out to be 6.75 point. If we look at how the respondents were distributed on the acceptance of changes' curve by E. Kubler-Ross (Figure 2), we can see that everyone has already passed the shock stage, and there are no respondents who are at the stage of denial, it is supposed that there is an understanding that distance learning will not go anywhere, but will only increase its scale.

much respondents agree with the statements about distance learning.

Tab. 1: Analysis of the degree of agreement with statements about distance learning

Statements	absolutely agree	partially agree	partially disagree	absolutely disagree	I find it difficult to answer
The distance learning format can be as effective as the online format	12%	58%	22%	7%	2%
Distance learning opens a large number of opportunities for teachers	18%	52%	17%	10%	3%
I have an understanding of how to organize an educational process in an on-line format	8%	45%	42%	5%	0%
I know what skills I need to develop in order to effectively conduct distance learning	22%	58%	10%	3%	7%
I work good in the educational platforms where I conduct my lessons	7%	40%	38%	7%	8%

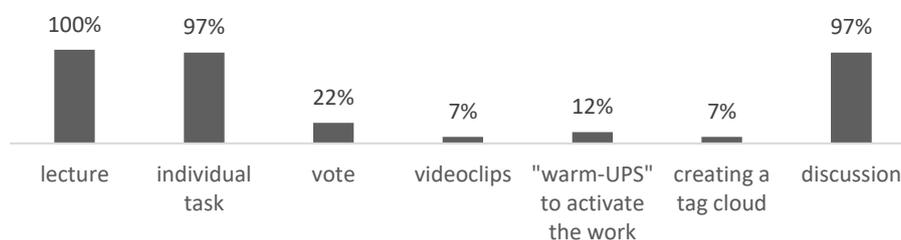
Source: authors field study results

1.2. The skills that teachers need to develop

Answering the question «What you need to do to make online learning at your University more effective», the most popular ideas were: conduct training events for teachers (58% respondents), expand the capabilities of educational platforms (38%), attract different specialists to create classes (for example, to create a video series). The skills which can help teacher to be more effective in distance learning are the following ones: interactive methods in distance learning (58%), creating interesting presentations (45%), working in a digital platform (38%), communication in an online format with students (38%), creating your own image and style (18%). The gadget generation (12% among the teachers surveyed, this is the one who is less than 25 years old) is more adapted in working with software and experiences less difficulties from learning platforms (as they stressed themselves). It is worth to have a look at the tools which teachers use in online classes (Figure 3). It shows that the most popular tools are lecture, individual tasks and discussion. The tools which can help to do classes more interactive and interesting (vote, videoclips, "warm-UPS" to activate the work, creating a tag cloud) are used

by a small number of teachers.

Fig. 3: The tools which teachers use in online classes



Source: authors field study results

One more tool which was not researched in our survey is clarifying questions. Vinogradova T.I., Beskrovnaya V.A., Freidkina E.M. write that “to test the perception of the material during the lecture, it is worthwhile from time to time to ask clarifying questions that require an immediate answer, regardless of online or offline student listening to the lecture” (719, Vinogradova T.I., Beskrovnaya V.A., Freidkina E.M.,2019). According to the authors, the tools used in classes in online format strongly influence the involvement of students in the learning process. In distance learning, the tools for assessing students' engagement can be how often they respond in a chat, whether they turn on the camera. The creation of such a learning environment for students, which contributes to increase motivation to formulate their thoughts, will help to develop of such supra-professional competencies as communication, information management and systems thinking. It is worth to mention that those teachers who had used modern technologies in training (not only the digital ones), they quickly adapted to the current conditions and were able to enter their content in an online format (according to their own assessment). The authors think that classical schools lose out to ordinary training companies, which often do not have the necessary depth of knowledge. They may have superficial content, but it is served "delicious". Now students are attracted to beautiful packages of questionable content. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to learn how to create “delicious” classes without losing depth. To do this, it is important to master tools that allow to increase the involvement and activity of students during classes. At the same time using these tools is help to build a system of communication with students to contribute not only the increasing of their academic knowledge, but also the development of student’s supra-professional competencies. The students study to report their thoughts, increasing awareness and responsibility during training. Although it is worth emphasizing that “students are not yet ready for completely independent

work and will not be able to learn complicated topics and do assignments without the personal assistance of a teacher” (398, Kireev B., Zhundibayeva A., Aktanova A., 2019).

1.3. The quality of communication with students during distance learning

If we look at the analysis of the quality of feedback from students during distance learning (Table 2), we could note that many teachers (according to their estimates) were able to ensure the involvement and activity of students. Although there is no doubt about the quality of feedback, the level of engagement and activity still needs to be evaluated from the point of view of students and compared results.

Tab. 2: Analysis of the degree of agreement with statements about the quality of communication with students during distance learning

Statements	absolutely agree	partially agree	partially disagree	absolutely disagree	I find it difficult to answer
The level of involvement of students in distance learning is quite high	15%	42%	25%	12%	7%
The involvement and activity of students in distance learning depends on the educational platform	8%	20%	50%	18%	3%
I was able to establish high-quality feedback during distance learning	20%	42%	33%	3%	2%

Source: authors field study results

Another point that we would like to write is how teachers evaluate the importance of turning on students' video cameras, so that they can see them and evaluate their reaction to classes. 80% of respondents note that the lack of opportunities to see their students (who often prefer to turn off the cameras and communicate only via chat and sometimes use a microphone), creates discomfort during classes. The survey showed that most teachers (60% of respondents) use messengers in addition to training platforms, creating the thematic conversations there. Thus, teachers are getting “closer” to students, due to circumstances, both sides have phone numbers,

there are individual conversations in social networks, availability in the teacher's profile and increased personalization of training. This creates certain difficulties for the teachers.

Conclusion

In a situation of a global pandemic, turbulence of socio-economic processes, the growing influence of information technology on all spheres of human life is increasingly visible. The professional activity of teachers, who need to be reorganized, learn how to effectively use ICT in working with students, has undergone a serious technological test. Education in higher education currently relies on interaction with a large number of platforms and electronic tools. The distance learning is not becoming a separate form of education, but is embedded in the main element of national educational programs and standards.

Our research is one of the steps that showed the challenges and opportunities of distance learning. Additionally, we can explore how students evaluate such a rapid transition to a full transition to a distance format. Also, a separate area of study may be devoted to how it affects the development of students' supra-professional competence, continuing research by scientists who indicate that it increases the independence of students, developing a communicative environment, mastering the latest information technologies. At the same time, we are facing some difficulties in developing competencies in the field of team work, which is limited to communication through electronic communication systems. Can fully media-literacy and communication through ICT replace the offline interaction of students during group work? However, the following conclusions can be drawn now:

1. Teachers need to develop tools that make the distance format interesting and "delicious", providing students with equal opportunities for the development of professional and professional competencies.
2. It is important to create a supportive environment for teachers by creating necessary administrative structures (or changing existing ones), adding those who help create training courses (for example, creating a video series, updating existing educational platforms etc.).
3. In addition, we consider it necessary and compulsory to organize educational events for teachers, which will reduce the technological "gap" in their competencies and the requirements of the digital economy.
4. Reviewing the load of teachers, changing and increasing motivational structures will allow the teacher not only to get involved in the educational process using ICTs and distance learning, but also to reduce the likelihood of negative psychological consequences for their health.

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