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Advantages and disadvantages of distance learning

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Education all over the world is undergoing unprecedented challenge. Due to the Covid-19 almost all educational institutions have closed their doors, making teachers and learners shift from the conventional education to the distance one. So, the process of learning has not stopped, it has got an updated format. Of course, before the worldwide quarantine there had been a lot of institutions that ran distant courses, but for now virtually all traditional courses have switched from offline to online.

Universities of Ukraine are not an exception. After two months of online teaching and learning we can come to the conclusion that distant learning does work, having both advantages and disadvantages. Luckily, we live in the era of modern technologies, without them we could not maintain the learning process. As almost all students own computers, smart phones and the Internet, distance learning can go on without spending extra money. The Internet offers a large quantity of resources that can support teaching and learning practices in order to organize socio-constructivist, student-centred and task-based lessons (2).

There are a lot of websites and mobile applications used for this purpose. During the quarantine a lot of corporations provide free services, for example, Coursera gives a chance to complete an online course free of charge. Google offers Meet for videoconferencing for free. Also we can use Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams for online video lessons. For text communication between students and teachers everything is unchanged: e-mail, Telegram, Viber, Whatsapp etc. Teachers can share the links to Youtube videos or even create Youtube channels to share their knowledge.

Google Classroom is a great time saver for teachers. On this platform teachers set tasks to students and receive their works, there is no need to download the work of each student from the mailbox, as works are located within the Google Drive. Teachers can create a test with different types of questions, type in the answers to the test questions and the Google will check everything automatically, creating a list of grades of each student with the analysis of common mistakes.

A great chance is to learn from home, in comfortable conditions, with no need to commute to a university, so valuable time is saved. Moreover, if it's an online course, students are not limited to do the tasks in the morning or afternoon, they can study in the evening or at night, what is more convenient for working students. So students are given the chance to allocate their time properly. Some students indicate that they have got more time for self-development and hobbies, they enjoy spending more time with their family members.

At the same time, there are a lot of disadvantages of distance learning. If we talk about health, we should mention that both teachers and students spend much more time in front of the computer or other electronic device, damaging eyesight and posture. With the increased use of Distance Learning, the physical aspect of learning is often neglected (1).

Students have to master a lot of theoretical material on their own, they have to do a lot of tasks, as well as teachers have to work out tasks and check assignments. This can really affect the psychological and emotional mood. Distance learning is not just saying "do this and do that". There should be interaction, feedback and support. Students lack live communication, as at university students do not only acquire knowledge, they also learn to interact in the society.

Another disadvantage is that some students ignore distance learning, some of them have real excuses – no computers and the Internet. The similar is applied for teachers: there are still those who do not have enough computer skills. If we had been warned about the global quarantine, maybe we would have got prepared better and acquired new skills for that.

One more problem with distance learning is cheating, we can't control how students do their tasks, they can use any source they want. So we can't really examine their knowledge during online testing, we just check that they are resourceful and they continue studying. In some cases we can check their knowledge in video apps, but when there are a lot of participants in online videoconference, we are limited in time. So to deal with this, teachers need to be creative. They have to create tasks that cannot be done automatically, randomly clicking on answers in tests. Creativity and flexibility are quite important in online-teaching.

Weighing all the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning we can't say it's bad or good, it's just new, unusual but it works great for students and teachers. We are lucky to have Information and Communication Technologies that are intermediates of distance learning. If teachers and students take a little bit more efforts, the learning process won't be interrupted. Hopefully, this will end sooner or later and we will come back to the educational institutions and the role of teachers in the distance learning won't be underestimated.

Literature

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