

22 2020: Distant Learning Outcomes in Russia

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22.1 Abstract

The pandemic became the key for a rapid transition to distant learning. The author considers matters of distant learning at schools, higher schools and extended education during the pandemic, and describes the main results. The conclusions were made based on the investigated progress of massive introduction of electronic means and on the own experience of the author in the field of learning and teaching online.

Keywords: pandemic, e-learning, motivation, distant learning, distant communication means, communication

2020 turned to be one of the toughest years of the last decades. The problems caused by the pandemic demanded super-fast reactions and solutions, which impacted the development of e-life generally. Clearly, the pandemic enabled the digital break in Russia. This one could be expected obviously under the normal life in several years only. Companies and establishments trying to survive started transiting their business-processes into e-field intensively. Education is in there, too.

Numerous instruments for distant communication started developing and became popular in 2020. The platforms and means used earlier by the education flagmen only became wide spread with different success of their mastering. The discussion about merits and demerits of e-learning has been held for many years. Can education be completely automatic, without human participation? How effective video-courses with or without feedback are? And many others. But no one may hesitate answering the question about whether education transits to e-media. And this answer is yes. More or less e-learning has been being realized with introduction of the Internet. The first archetype of Moodle existed in Germany, for example in 1998³⁸ already, but surely distant learning tools were then just loading of materials and tasks by teachers and students, and e-testing. For the past 20 years, the developed countries have provided their education process with electronic means and platforms for educational comfort. In 2012 in Iceland, many courses were tried on and completely transferred into Internet. Many teachers have made their choice for distant learning with or without contact hours (7). Recently, the online-universities became very popular, offering no other communication but distant one, but just few of them offer fundamental education and state diplomas³⁹.

The pandemic made realization of the massive experiment with distant e-learning in Russia much earlier than the overall technical and moral readiness to such a transition was provided. Nowadays, certain conclusions of this experiment may be done based on the information from the open sources.

In April 2020, e-learning came almost to every school, higher school and extended learning units of Russia. And these three fields resulted completely different. Many elementary and secondary schools had to finish their academic year earlier than planned (4). On one hand, through the necessity to provide safety of students and teachers. On the other hand, through

³⁸ Personal experience of the author during studying at the HTW Dresden, BRD.

³⁹ In Russia, state universities and diplomas have much more acknowledgement than private ones

the fact, that the school experiment deemed to be a failure. Troubles with no modern computers, no chance to find a quiet place for studying and working, several different-aged children in one family, no motivation and many other complications. Many had to face those and could not overcome. Troubles of technical unreadiness blocked development of learning processes. But this is one component only. The school distant learning failed due to many reasons, including socialization and communication need. Direct contact means a lot. Although many schools and teachers tried to arrange almost fully-featured classes using Zoom, the problem of the direct contact remained unsolved. Any online communication remains virtual, not alive (3). It is obvious that the correct contact communication contributes much to keeping motivation of students and their readiness to learn extra information and make home tasks. How one can do it with e-resources only? There is no straight answer yet.

In the higher education field, this transition to distant learning was comparatively easier. Above all, there are Universities in Russia offering distant learning with state diplomas at graduation. One of those is the former University of History of Cultures, now Educational Medium Higher School. 23-years of working experience demonstrates effectiveness [5] and makes a sort of paragon for other higher education establishments. But it is more exclusion. In general, one can say that universities and higher schools reacted faster upon the restrictions and could transfer the educational process into Internet not losing time and quality. For example, at the Saint Petersburg State University of Economics the teachers received recommendations to use next to Moodle also BBB⁴⁰, Adobe Connect⁴¹, which used to be applied during classes with disabled students, and Zoom too. Thanks to it, the summer semester continued without significant troubles; the fall semester also started in this format⁴². Many higher schools have distant classes only. But there are higher schools with directions, which do not assume intensive application of e-learning, for example, medical universities. Skills received with application of video-conferences will be doubtful. In both cases efficiency of the online education depends on motivation of students.

A certain concern is required for foreign students in Russia studying here within the frames of academic exchange. In spring, some foreign students were unhappy about online-courses, but it was hardly connected to the course quality, but with impossibility to contact each other in and out classrooms⁴³. Education in Moscow or in Saint Petersburg gives foreign student a wide range of choices for studying, learning culture and history and employment. According to the survey of foreign students, 84.3% of them is interested in employment in Russia, 16.2% is ready to work during studies. 72.1% is ready to work in the region of studies. 86.3% of foreigners would like to combine working and studying, and 10.3% would like to work at the University (1). With online education, the choices and intentions of employment in Russia decrease significantly. The same applies to Russian students studying abroad. So online education although being available is much less interesting for students than contact learning.

And finally, extended learning. Distant learning has been flourishing here since long ago. The market divides into two categories: contact and contactless educational services. Many e-courses, e-trainings and others may be found in the Internet with participation online only. In other words, people making decision about taking part in this course understand completely, that the contacts with the coach or teacher will be restricted by the Internet. Motivation of the participants of these courses is very high, because in most cases these courses are not mandatory.

Summing up what has been mentioned, one of the first conclusions is as follows: efficiency of online-education depends mostly on motivation, responsibility and disciplines of students. The more informed choice was, the higher the probability of efficiency of e-learning is. Age means a lot too: the younger the student is, the more complicated is concentration for him/her (2) and

⁴⁰ Moodle tool for video-conferences.

⁴¹ Software for web-conferences.

⁴² Excluding first year students who had contact hours in September based on a special schedule (5)

⁴³ Personal experience of the author at realization of the online-course of Management in SMEs in English in April-May 2020 at the Saint Petersburg State University of Economics.

the faster he/she loses interest in the subject. The second obvious conclusion is, that the motivation “on the other side”, meaning by the teacher shall be very high too. Online-education requires new approaches to arrangement of educational processes to make classes more effective and insightful even under the pandemic.

22.2 Conclusions:

1. Motivation of students and teachers being participants of e-learning means a lot.
2. For the elementary and secondary schools, online-education is a possible but more auxiliary form, because it does not provide necessary processes.
3. For higher education establishments, online-education may be effective provided correct approach to its arrangement by management and teachers considering specifics of certain higher education establishments. But it is too early to speak about readiness and advisability of total transition to e-learning.
4. For foreign students, online-education opening chances to take part in world-wide courses almost close chances of employment abroad.
5. For extended learning (self-learning), online-education is very attractive, because usually students are highly motivated and ready to overcome difficulties.
6. For arrangement of harmonized online-education at elementary, secondary and higher schools, it is required to think over not technical, but social components too, because contact communication means for participants a lot.

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