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Summary: The article discusses the use of distance learning as a way to ensure the educational process in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics are presented to illustrate the consequences of mass school closures caused by the pandemic. Arguments are given in favour of using the distance learning format as a long-term solution. Difficulties of a technical nature that may accompany the transition to distance learning are noted. The author concludes that it is advisable to take into account the acquired experience with a view to the further development of the educational system.

Key words: distance learning; distance learning technologies; COVID-19.

COVID-19: ПЕРЕОСМЫСЛЕНИЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ЗАВТРАШНЕГО ДНЯ

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается вопрос использования дистанционной формы обучения как способа обеспечения образовательного процесса в условиях пандемии COVID-19. Представлены статистические данные, иллюстрирующие последствия массового закрытия школ в контексте пандемии. Приводятся аргументы в пользу использования дистанционного формата обучения как решения, рассчитанного на долгосрочную перспективу. Отмечаются трудности технического характера, которые могут сопровождать переход на дистанционное обучение. Делается вывод о целесообразности учета приобретенного опыта при дальнейшем конструировании образовательного пространства.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное обучение; дистанционные образовательные технологии; COVID-19.

One of the major challenges of the XXI century lies within the sphere of education. Considered to be the panacea for a number of problems of economic, political, social and cultural nature, education requires that certain strategies and standards are elaborated and that the appropriate institutions are established [0, с. 29].

While different actors, both on a national and international scale, continue seeking the pedagogical models that are optimal in terms of sustainability and efficiency, the initial challenge is to assure the access to education as the implication of the fundamental human right – the right to education.

Numerous studies conducted by international agencies show that the current situation calls for action. According to UNESCO, 262 million of primary and secondary school age children and youth do not attend school. Moreover, 1 adolescent out of 5 is left out of secondary education [0].

The problem has yet aggravated due to the current epidemiological context. More than 90 % of students around the world have been affected by the school closures. According to the first global numbers published by UNESCO, about 290 million students were out of school as of 4 March 2020; this number reached 1,57 milliard as of 21 April 2020 [0]. The very fact of schools being closed entailed considerable repercussions of social and economic nature.

Nonetheless, the urgent and unprecedented challenges often reveal serious gaps that exist in the established systems and inspire rapid and efficient solutions. In fact, a series of measures in the sphere of distance learning has been adopted by local governments as well as on a global level. National platforms and learning tools are available in different world regions.

In the context of social distancing the overwhelming part of educational process has been transferred into digital format. This form of education has essentially managed to sustain the education in the circumstances of self-isolation. However, distance learning should not be considered as an enforced provisional measure: it can be beneficial in the long run.

Nowadays distance learning implies active usage of gadgets. Erasing age limits and social status inequalities, this approach falls within the concept of lifelong learning. Moreover, it makes the education more accessible and liberal, to a certain extent [0].

Due to a wide range of pedagogical tools, it is possible to transfer the majority of subjects into digital format in order to provide consistent quality education [0].

Modern technologies enable learning individually as well as in groups. Namely, they include a range of functions that allow teachers to guide and control the learning process and provide rapid and detailed response to everyone. Moreover, some tools intend to reproduce, as much as it possible, the atmosphere of a classroom with visual and verbal contact between the students and the teachers [0]. Owing to online communication, this type of software allows to hold videoconferences, give presentations and share files.

Other than saving time that can be used, for instance, to combine studies and work, distance learning inspires the development of some key competencies, such as time-management and self-discipline [0]. Numerous resources encourage initiative as regards learning – a precious quality for a specialist in any sphere. Web-sites that offer massive open online courses gather entire communities of students who benefit from their time while acquiring new skills.

Although the basic elements of distance learning were previously elaborated, the schools were reluctant to abandon the traditional formats for several reasons. Firstly, one of the major disadvantages of distance learning is the lack of personal contact among the participants of educational process, which is one of the main conditions when it comes to developing sociocultural competence. Secondly, the moderation with regard to using these tools is due to the lack of digital competences among students as well as teachers, for they are not always instructed to work this way. Finally, not all the students and teachers have a suitable gadget with access to Internet, which is a necessary prerequisite of distance learning [0].

Other disadvantages are usually associated with the gaps of technical nature; thus, they have provisional character [0]. For instance, the authenticity of the assignments submitted by students can be ensured by means of more transparent mechanisms of evaluation.

In conclusion, it would be fair to say that the current sanitary-epidemiological situation has definitely affected the entire sphere of education globally. Although it is too early to judge, it is obvious that the pandemic has triggered the active usage of numerous digital tools. From this perspective, we have reached the point where the long-term usage of digital resources should be reconsidered in a more profound and systematic way. Consequently, the usage of electronic devices will be not only a decent response to emergency circumstances, but also a sign of movement toward progressive solutions in education.

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