

Changes in the Tertiary Education System in Pandemic Times: Comparison of Ukrainian and Polish Universities

Yuriy KLAPKIV¹,
Tetiana DLUHOPOLSKA²

¹Ph.D, Assoc. Professor, University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland, e-mail address: jurij.klapkiv@uni.lodz.pl

²Ph.D, Ternopil National Economic University, Ternopil, Ukraine, e-mail address: tetianadluhopolska@gmail.com

Abstract: The article discusses the challenges faced by universities during forced quarantine because of COVID-19. The article provides examples of successful online learning practices of Polish and Ukrainian universities, as well as the problematic aspects faced by HEIs. The focus of the article is on the forms of online learning, the specifics of their combination and the particularities of use in leading universities in Poland and Ukraine. The situation of the need for self-isolation has forced universities not only to shift the vector of providing educational services. Approaches to accounting of working hours and forms of direct communication between students and teachers were modernized. Vectors of changing approaches to university education, requirements for teachers and students are given in connection with the possible prolonged period of self-isolation because of coronavirus.

Keywords: *tertiary education; online courses; knowledge; coronavirus; COVID-19.*

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1. Introduction

Considering the rapidly increasing population's incidence of coronavirus worldwide (Coronavirus COVID-19, 2020), education is being forced to respond quickly to new challenges, like most other spheres of public life. Because of the pandemic 2020 enforced social exclusion of populations initiated by governments in developed and developing countries has threatened the quality of education. Although the online format of knowledge acquisition both in secondary and tertiary education has been used for a long time, it has been complementary rather than replaced by off-line education. The personal contact of the teacher with the student, social communication in the school or university environment, participation in collective actions stimulated the development of hard and soft skills. However, with the beginning of the pandemic, everything has changed.

2. Literature review

Although pandemics in the world economy is not a new phenomenon (Cheng, Lau, Woo, & Yuen, 2007), such a massive and rapid disease as COVID-19 the modern economy is still unaware. So, today there are just a few publications on the pandemic impact of 2019-2020 on various spheres of the global economy. The paper (Malinowska, 2020) analyzes the rate of decline of the global economy due to population infection on COVID-19. The work (Tam & El-Azar, 2020) predicts the trends of education changes caused by the pandemic: 1) innovative online learning technologies, 2) development of public-private partnership in education, 3) polarization of population in access to education.

The paper (Stavytskyy, Dluhopolskyi, Kharlamova, Karpuk & Osetsyi, 2019) assesses the development of Ukrainian universities in the context of their incorporation into a the innovative-entrepreneurial model in the era of Education 4.0. The works (Szymanska & Klapkiv, 2019; Łyskawa, Kędra, Klapkiv & Klapkiv, 2019; Klapkiv & Klapkiv, 2018) discuss digitalization process and main cyber risks for institutions. The resource (Distance learning solutions, 2020) provides tips for using online tools for home-based learning.

3. Current Educational Challenges at the Tertiary Education in Ukraine and Poland

3.1. Ukrainian case

The forced self-isolation of students and teachers in March 2020 because of declared quarantine for an indefinite time made significant adjustments to the routine work of the Ukrainian universities. Some of HEIs, who used before the quarantine 2020 main benefits of distance education in students assessing, giving them access to additional literature, conducting webinars with foreign lecturers (for example, UCU, Ostroh Academy, KSE, TNEU, TNPU and many others), use on-line education quite effectively. The Moodle system, which has been used in Ukrainian HEIs for many years, allows the university administration to monitor the activity both teachers and students in the distance learning system, facilitate the knowledge assessment through typical tasks and tests, stimulate to accustom to the systematic material study, et. However, the main challenges today are related to the format of the online lectures.

For example, in 2016 the TNEU has prepared for distance education. The international cooperation between TNEU (Ukraine) and CEU (Hungary) within the framework of “KF Global E-School in Eurasia” (Dluhopolskyi, 2017) allowed many English-speaking students to gain additional knowledge from Korean-European studies using modern online learning technologies. However, such preparation was optional, required high motivation for additional classes and knowledge, and it was overcome by not all students (around 70% success), due to the not obligatory of disciplines, lack of methodology for recalculation of non-formal education results in formal education.

However, the global quarantine due to a pandemic 2020 require a systematic knowledge of delivering online lectures and seminars, remote communication with students under the new rules, et. However, many HEIs teachers in Ukraine are not ready for these institutional challenges. The reasons are not only age but also the reluctance to learn new things with students, to master modern technologies because of uncertainty in the future and low salaries (Shostak, 2019). Educational conformism in the HEIs of Ukraine, linked to non-transparent staffing procedures, financial barriers to dissertation defenses, creates “negative selection”, blocks qualitative and rapid changes in the higher education system.

3.2. Polish case

The modern pandemic has first and foremost overcome the psychological barrier to the use of distance education. Despite the opportunities available, only a handful of teachers used the Moodle as an adjunct to the classic form of doing classes in Poland. Given the specifics, areas such as economics and finance have adapted rapidly, where the use of online technologies is directly inherent in doing business. This was also facilitated by the theoretical training that universities in Poland provided on a regular basis, mainly in the form of trainings for teachers on the capabilities of the Moodle. This made it possible to move quickly to distance learning. Thus, at the University of Lodz, all subjects identified in the USOS system for the 2019/2020 summer semester were automatically created on the Moodle platform and added to each relevant student group. In addition to the classic mullahs, Microsoft Teams Teamwork centre in Office 365 application is used for video conferencing with students of this group. Coupled with the ability to send e-mails to a specific group of students through the USOS system, the opportunity to gather all students within a single video conference using a licensed software was allocated for a certain hour.

Meanwhile, well-prepared and implemented virtual classes, trainings based on the latest achievements of distance learning, are no inferior to the classical way of conducting classes, and in the absence of irritating external factors for the participants, may be more effective than them. The free Office 365 Teams enables even 6-year-old students to communicate with teachers and classmates in video mode, allowing them to concentrate attention on the most demanding consumers of educational services outside educational institutions.

Additionally, for the students, there is a possibility to use Universality, the main advantage of which is more than 2000 completed tasks in various mainly technical disciplines. In most universities in Poland (University of Lodz, University of Warsaw, WSEI, Economic University of Poznan and others), it is a condition of recognition that the classes were conducted in the e-learning mode, using at least one (for lectures) or two (seminars, laboratories) interactive methods of communication with the student (webinars, assignments, workshops, test, chat, forum, quiz, etc.). The libraries are the one of the main sources of information for the academic activities of teachers and students, which have also been involved in remote activities. In addition to classic access to paid databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis and dozens of

others, libraries offer preparing bibliography for scientific papers, ordering digital copies of books and magazines, which greatly simplifies remote scientific activity.

The comparison of the on-line challenges of two countries can be useful for the international community. Before the pandemic in both countries distance education was quite rare, unlike the US or UK. The online lecture format in Poland and Ukraine was used mostly as an auxiliary tool. But today students are ready to take online courses, learn on their own with the teacher's mentorship, and teachers are ready to learn new technical opportunities for conveying information. Often, students' online attendance exceeds their offline ones. Technical capability is a major factor in the success of online education, in addition to human capital. The key HEI's problems arise precisely from the imperfection of the technical support of distance lectures.

4. Conclusion

Massive COVID-19 sickness in early 2020 has forced most governments worldwide, including Ukraine and Poland, to take tough measures that limit key human rights but save lives and reduce the spread of the pandemic. The educational sphere, with its remarkable capabilities for remote presentation and perception of information, in Ukrainian realities was largely unprepared for new challenges. There are several reasons for this: 1) the bureaucracy of the management vertical of most state universities, 2) process-oriented rather than result-oriented, 3) educational conformism, 4) lack of motivation and self-discipline of both students and teachers. Both in Poland and Ukraine in conditions of self-isolation, the system of work of students in groups within the framework of joint projects was modernized, using systems of distance learning or videoconferences. Recommendations for both students and teachers in the context of distance education are flexibility in using available services (Moodle, Zoom, BigBlueButton, Padlet, Viber). It is also important to establish personal communication and feedback between teachers and students. The gained experience of HEIs will complement classical education in the post-crisis period, since it will change the outlook and skills of the currently involved in the educational process. Today the educational space is very turbulent, and force majeure through coronavirus requires more flexibility from all participants in the educational process.

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