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Anti-crisis management in Higher Education institutions of Ukraine during the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT. The article provides an overview of the anti-crisis managerial strategies of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and educational authorities of Ukrainian higher education institutions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study comprises results of the on-line survey conducted between the 1st of March 2021 and 11th of April 2021 and covering 380 respondents (faculty members of 12 major higher education institutions in various regions of the country). The statistical and descriptive analysis of the challenges faced by Ukrainian teachers was carried out. The review makes clear that anti-crisis management activities (organizational, socio-psychological, technical, etc.) during corona-based closures have not yet been the object of sufficient surveys and therefore remain an unexplored phenomenon. The review presented proves the urgency of the problem of development of anti-crisis management activities and is intended to facilitate educational anti-crisis management. In addition, the study provides a relevant information basis for decisions and action in politics, administration and academic practice.

Keywords: COVID-19, online teaching, challenge, educational management, higher education.

Gestão Anticrise nas instituições de Ensino Superior da Ucrânia durante a Pandemia da COVID-19

RESUMO. O artigo fornece uma visão geral das estratégias de gestão anticrise do Ministério da Educação da Ucrânia e das autoridades educacionais das instituições de ensino superior ucranianas no contexto da pandemia COVID-19. O estudo compreende os resultados da pesquisa on-line realizada entre 1º de março de 2021 e 11 de abril de 2021 e abrangeu 380 respondentes (docentes das 12 principais instituições de ensino superior de diferentes regiões do país). Foi realizada a análise estatística e descritiva dos desafios enfrentados pelos professores ucranianos. A análise deixa clara que as atividades de gestão de anticrise (organizacional, sociopsicológica, técnica, etc.) durante os fechamentos causados pela Pandemia ainda não foram objetos de pesquisas suficientes e, portanto, permanecem um fenômeno inexplorado. A análise apresentada comprova a urgência do problema de desenvolvimento de atividades de gestão anticrise e visa facilitar a gestão educativa anticrise. Além disso, o estudo fornece uma base de informações relevantes para decisões e ações na política, administração e prática acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19, ensino online, desafio, gestão educacional, ensino superior.

Gestión anticrisis en las instituciones de Educación Superior de Ucrania durante la Pandemia del Covid-19

RESUMEN. El artículo ofrece una visión general de las estrategias de gestión anticrisis del Ministerio de Educación de Ucrania y de las autoridades educativas de los centros de enseñanza superior ucranianos en el contexto de la pandemia de COVID-19. El estudio comprende los resultados de la encuesta en línea realizada entre el 1 de marzo de 2021 y el 11 de abril de 2021 y abarcó a 380 encuestados (miembros del profesorado de las 12 principales instituciones de enseñanza superior de diferentes regiones del país). Se realizó un análisis estadístico y descriptivo de los retos a los que se enfrentan los profesores ucranianos. El análisis pone de manifiesto que las actividades de gestión anticrisis (organizativas, sociopsicológicas, técnicas, etc.) durante los cierres provocados por la pandemia aún no han sido objeto de suficiente investigación y, por tanto, siguen siendo un fenómeno inexplorado. El análisis presentado demuestra la urgencia del problema de desarrollar actividades de gestión anticrisis y pretende facilitar la gestión educativa anticrisis. Además, el estudio proporciona una base de información relevante para las decisiones y acciones en la política, la administración y la práctica académicas.

Palabras clave: COVID-19, enseñanza en línea, desafío, gestión educativa, educación superior.

Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector is unprecedented. The challenges emerging from this health emergency have caused a devastating blow to education systems in both developed and developing countries (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Melnyk et al., 2020; Toquero, 2020).

At the time of the "Corona crisis", the primary task of the Ministries of education in different countries was to ensure the continuity of the educational process, which led to the mandatory shift from the traditional face-to-face form of education to the remote format at all school levels in various countries (Ahmed et al., 2020; Panev, 2021). This indicates a radical change in methods, didactic and psychological models of teaching, compilation and development of digital educational content.

The roles of the educational management institutions of national and regional levels in the organization of both online and hybrid education, "starting with an allocation of financial and technical support, development of a legal base" (Merfeldaite et al., 2020) and agreement on further educational activities were quite different. While some countries issued methodological materials and recommendations for the online educational process (Lepp et al., 2021), others left their teachers without any methodological support, and they were pushed "to learn new virtual instruction pedagogy and platforms" (Pressley, 2021).

The pandemic has revealed the shortcomings of the existing higher education system and highlighted the need to improve teacher training to adapt to the rapidly changing global educational climate. The transition to distance learning has emphasized the inequality between students in villages and cities in accessing information resources: more than 4 million Ukrainians live in villages without high-quality fixed internet (Radchuk, 2021).

It has been established that all the participants of the educational process faced the challenges related to the lack of IT solutions for distance teaching and learning, psychological and technical readiness for distance teaching and learning, administrative/managerial support of faculty members and institutional e-learning policy (Kakepoto et al., 2021; Nenko et al., 2020) resulting in difficulties with student engagement (Chaudhary, 2020), technical issues, unreliable assessment due to the lack of specific trainings on the use of the digital tools of distance evaluation, professional burnout of teaching staff, radical reduction of live and direct communication and

impoverishment of a student life, etc., all of which impede effective e-learning and teaching.

The urgency of the research topic is due to modern challenges in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for rapid anti-crisis management decisions to improve the distance learning in the system of national education and "to maintain the critical teaching workforce" (Pressley, 2021).

After overcoming the pandemic crisis, distance learning and virtual education may become an integral part of the higher education system (Yelinska, 2020). To help reconcile such conflicting circumstances, there is hence a need for studies and methods that suggest sustainable pedagogical managerial strategies at the level of each single educational institution and in a broader context. Policymakers, experts, educational authorities, faculty members should collaborate closely to develop accessible learning environments, educational resources and tools to maintain the efficiency and accessibility of education.

Purpose of the study

The paper aims to provide insight into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational process in Ukrainian higher education institutions and to present the managerial anti-crisis strategies of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and educational authorities of Ukrainian higher education institutions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, the authors aim to present challenges faced by the faculty members due to the abrupt shift from face-to-face class to Emergency Remote Teaching.

Methods

Due to the closure of many Ukrainian educational institutions, online survey method was considered to be appropriate for data collection. The online survey was carried out during the period between the 1st of March 2021 and 11th of April 2021. A self-developed questionnaire was implied consisting of both closed ended and open-ended questions. The principal questions of the questionnaire referred to the demographic information, teaching experience, accessibility to online learning and teaching resources, prerequisites for online learning, digital literacy and personality traits, etc.

Sampling procedure

The Questionnaire (Ukrainian version) with the invitation to participate was distributed within 500 faculty members of major Ukrainian higher education institutions in various regions of

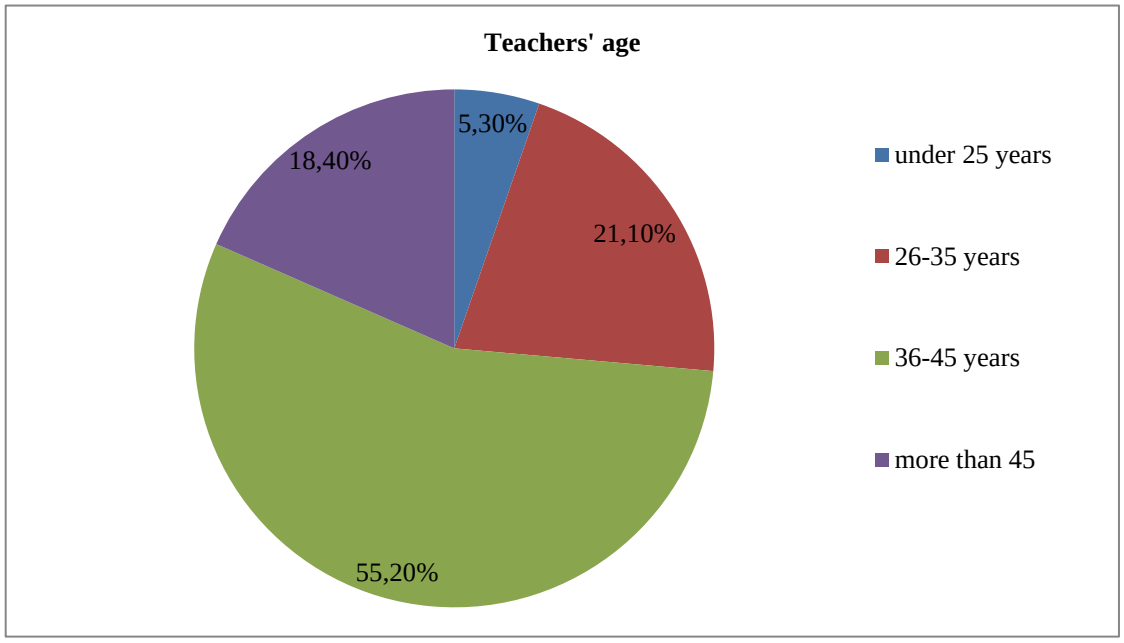
the country. The total number of respondents involved in the survey comprises 380 people. The participants participated voluntarily and received no compensation or benefit for their participation.

Participant characteristics

380 faculty members of Ukrainian higher education institutions ranging from a lecturer, associate professor and professor were taken as respondents of this study. There were no significant socio-demographic differences between respondents in different geographical areas of the survey. Respondents were evenly distributed by gender: 50% were male, 50% were female.

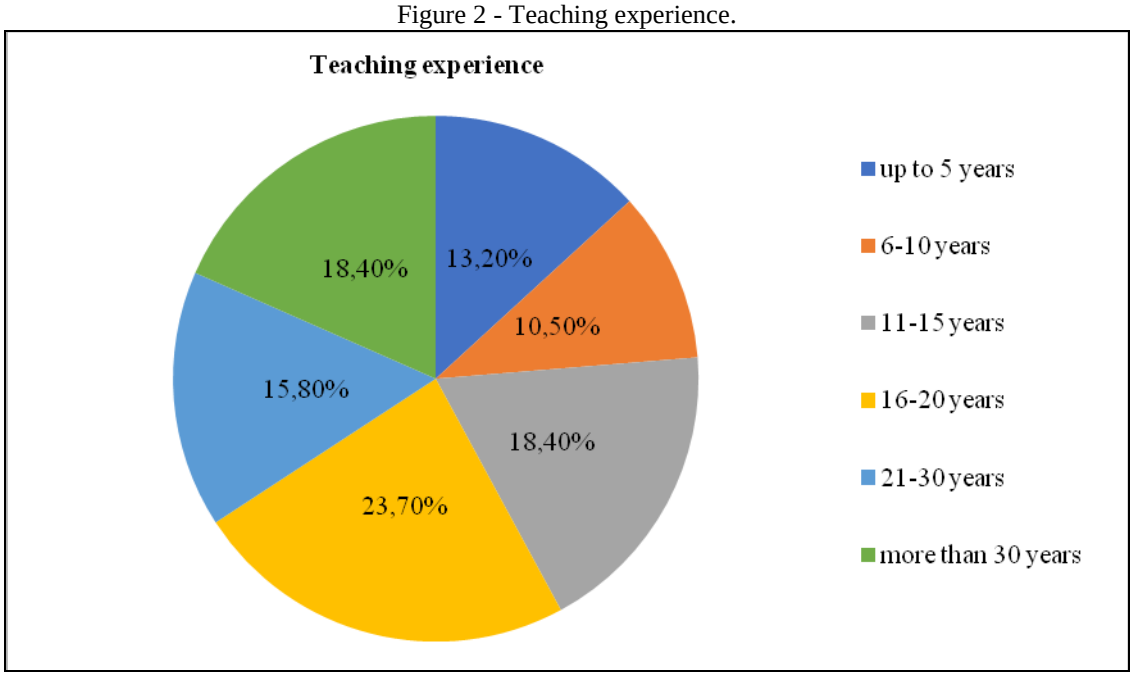
Ranking of teachers by age and teaching experience in higher education institutions is presented in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

Figure 1 - Age of faculty members.



Source: authors' calculations based on the conducted survey.

Figure 2 - Teaching experience.



Source: authors' calculations based on the conducted survey.

Data analytical procedure

The results of the survey were processed by methods of mathematical data processing. The obtained data were subjected to statistical analysis, followed by qualitative interpretation and meaningful generalization.

Theoretical framework and background

The pandemic has led to significant changes in education worldwide during 2020. At the beginning of quarantine in the spring of 2020, the vast majority of countries announced the temporary closure of all educational institutions for at least some time. As of April 6th, UNESCO reported that 188 countries have temporarily closed its educational institutions, while several countries implemented localized closures, affecting 1,576,021,818 learners (90%) (Eder, 2020). However, most of these institutions were not sufficiently prepared to maintain all of their courses online (Şenel & Şenel, 2021).

All Ukrainian universities have switched from full-time to distance learning since March 12, 2020, when the epidemic began in the country and the first cases of the disease were confirmed. According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers № 211 of March 11 (2020), quarantine was introduced throughout the country, and students were prohibited from attending educational institutions.

Initially, the quarantine was set for 3 weeks - until April 3, 2020. Lately, it was

extended three more times – until April 24, May 11 and May 22. Eventually, after the quarantine restrictions were eased, educational institutions began to resume educational activities. During the period of strict quarantine at the end of March, the Ministry of Education and Science sent explanations to the educational institutions on the organization of the end of the 2019/2020 academic year. The letter emphasized the autonomy decision making on forms of distance learning at its own discretion, however, recommended not to change the end of the academic year, so all educational institutions had to complete the educational process by July 1. Unfortunately, the Ministry did not offer any guidelines and advice that teachers could follow "to assure that the academic experience of students continued unencumbered by the pandemic" (Lynn & Ward-Smith, 2021). The situation was similar in other countries (Mikušková & Verešová, 2020).

From July 2020, adaptive quarantine was introduced in Ukraine. According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine № 641 of July 22, 2020, depending on a number of indicators (dynamics of the number of patients, number of places in hospitals, etc.) it was decided to assign one of 4 statuses to each administrative unit, which determined the degree of quarantine restrictions. The responsibility for deciding whether an educational institution switches to distance learning was assigned to the management of the educational institution.

There is a difference between government decisions in spring and autumn. During strict quarantine, when the number of patients in Ukraine was officially more insignificant, "education authorities have urged for classes at all levels to be moved online" (Eder, 2020), and it was not until early summer that some of them gradually opened to the public. In autumn, when the number of patients began to grow faster, the government tried to avoid distance learning and left the question of transferring the institution to a distance form of work at the discretion of educational management.

Before the current academic year, the Ministry of Education and Science released letters to higher education institutions regarding the organization of the 2020/2021 academic year. However, most of these recommendations concerned sanitary and hygienic standards. Concurrently, educational institutions were offered to employ methods of blended learning.

On October 16, 2020, Regulation on updated conditions for the organization of distance education developed by the

Ministry of Education and Science came into force. This document was rather a belated response, as it was issued more than a month after the start of the new academic year and contained brief explanations of the organizational processes of distance education. It lacked guidelines for distance education for different types of academic institutions, a list of minimum requirements and recommendations for the learning process.

Findings

The process of remote education still remains frustrating for all participants in the educational process: teaching staff, students, their parents, educational authorities. As we recognize students and faculty staff going back to full-time study, institutions were not prepared for the possibility that corona outbreaks may still occur, resulting in a potential lockdown and once again experiencing the inconvenience of continuing study via alternative means (Enterkin, 2020). Due to the lack or insufficient prior experience of distance learning and government response, a whole set of academic problems have arisen (Prokopenko & Berezhna, 2020). Underneath is a list of some of them, which is chiefly based on an online survey on distance learning management in Ukrainian educational institutions. It should be noted that the survey was conducted a year after the strict quarantine introduction, when all the institutions were first transferred to distance learning, and therefore show problems that are still relevant and unresolved.

The summarized findings of the questionnaire survey show that 18.4% of respondents who were initially negative about distance learning changed their opinion and would like to continue teaching in the online mode after quarantine restrictions, as such a format proved to be a convenient tool, especially in the context of the development of digital technologies.

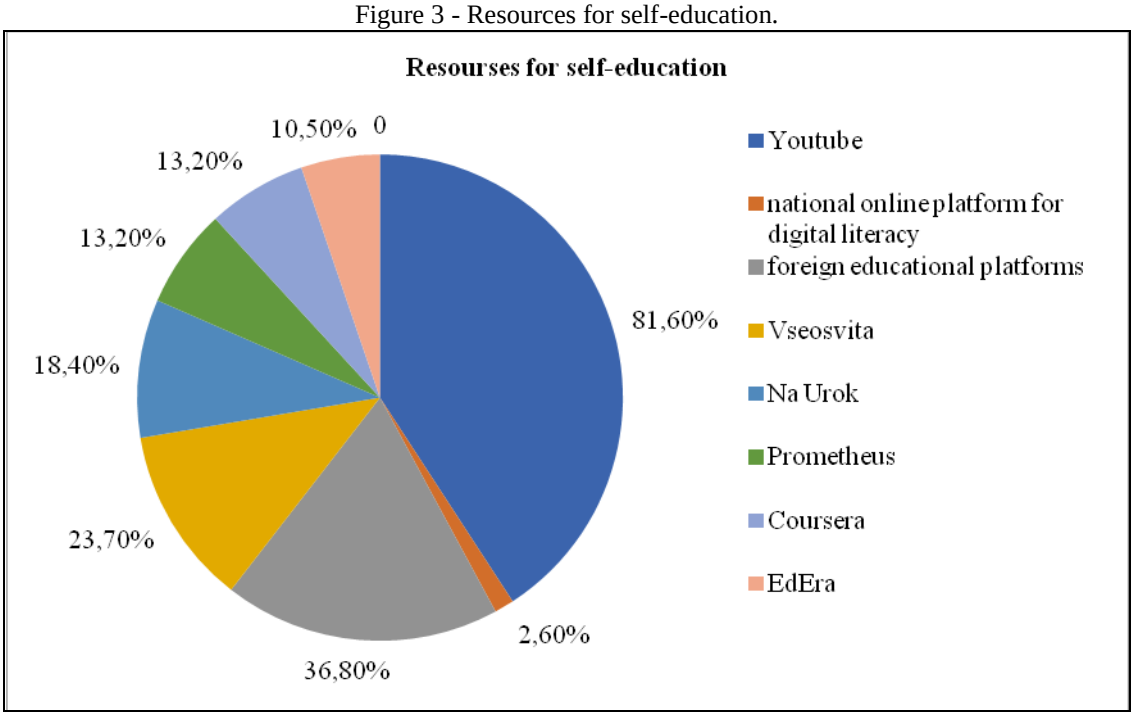
73.7% of the teachers are categorically against online learning and prefer only face-to-face classes. However, according to Ida PANEV (2021) teacher's favorable attitude is one of the key elements in the process of transforming classical onsite teaching into an online teaching.

7.9% of respondents consider blended type of education to be optimal nowadays, as the transition to online learning has granted broader autonomy, enough freedom for self-development and self-improvement, and has culminated in the emergence of innovative technical solutions in the teaching activities.

Lack of teachers' prior experience of distance teaching

According to the survey, the rapid transition to distance learning has been a problem in most universities as teachers previously had no experience of such educational activities, so they lack awareness and training for developing "engaging digital educational content, which can exaggerate the problem" (Hammond et al., 2020). 68.4% of teachers (260 respondents) reported that they did not formerly use distance learning technologies in their teaching activities. With the advent of the pandemic, rapid shift to remote education "would challenge even the well-prepared, stable, and experienced teacher workforce", therefore, it is critically beneficial that educators be "well supported in confronting the challenges that they face" (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). It would be valuable for teachers to receive advice on how to "move teaching content and materials into the online space" (Allen et al., 2020), give feedback, train skills, assess progress and determine the duration of educational activities in distance learning. We may assume that teachers faced the problem of lack of experience and skills of distance learning, absence of recommendations on distance teaching during quarantine and were forced to master online teaching skills on their own, which was noted by 92.1% of faculty members (350 respondents). The list of the most popular resources for self-education of teachers is presented in Fig. 3.

Figure 3 - Resources for self-education.



Source: authors' calculations based on the conducted survey.

In addition to the experience of distance learning, personal qualities are important, such as the desire (ability) for self-education and self-development, digital literacy, creativity, diligence, motivation, responsibility, activity, communication, ability to adapt, self-demand, flexibility.

At the same time, teachers openly pointed out the lack of such qualities as creativity, patience, perseverance, flexibility.

Lack of access to high-speed Internet and equipment needed for training

This problem has affected both teachers and students. According to the survey, 94.7% of teachers (360 respondents) had a computer, laptop, tablet or Smartphone and properly functioning WIFI prior to the introduction of distance learning at home. 2.6% (10 respondents) use computer at a work place and almost equivalent number of teachers use their cell phones as means of distance teaching.

18.4% (70 respondents) complained about the lack of sufficient technical means for quality teaching of their disciplines, and 2.6% indicated a low-speed Internet connection.

29.4% of teachers (106 respondents) shared distance learning gadgets with their children or other family members.

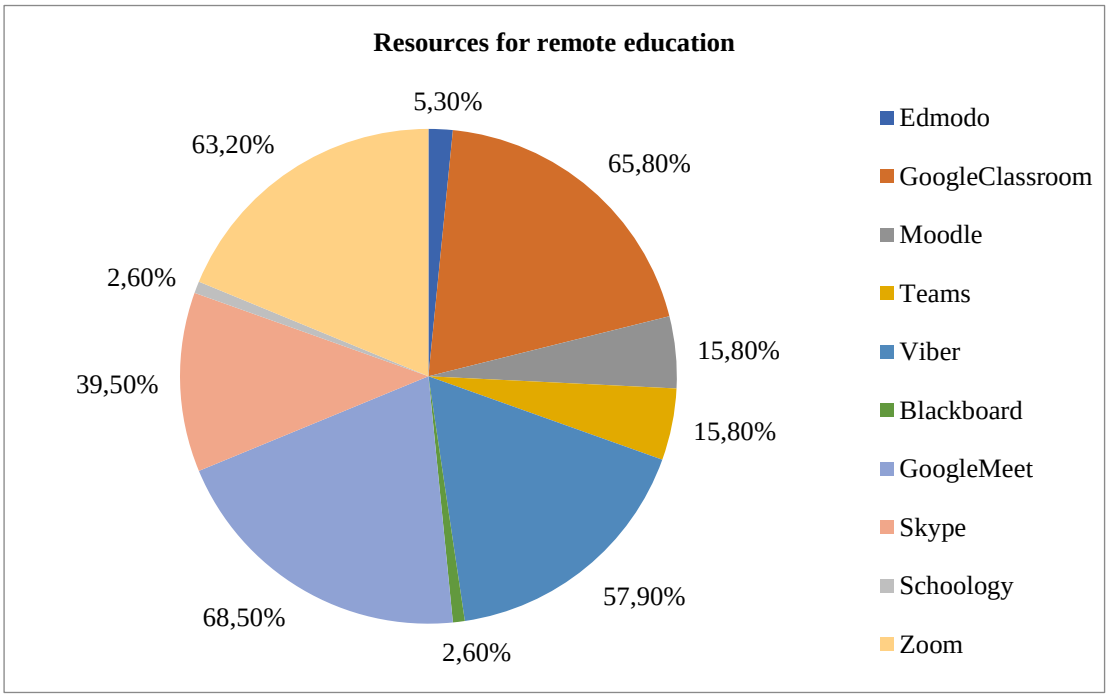
Diversity of educational platforms

Much of the material is left for self-study. In many educational institutions, distance learning initially looked like delivering material for self-study from textbooks, written assignments to assess knowledge and evaluate results without discussion, feedback and explanations. The results of the survey on the most commonly used tools for the interaction between teachers and students also confirm the attempts of some teachers to pass self-study as distance learning due to lack of previous experience.

57.9% (220) of faculty members use Viber during their teaching activities. Accordingly, they regularly send educational tasks for self-study through the messenger, which is actually independent learning, not distance learning. Some teachers replaced distance learning with written works, which led to the excessive workload of students. Such methods are unconducive to high-quality mastering the material, but rather cause additional stress. Moreover, the situation within one educational institution could be contradictory, as some teachers demanded written work, while others provided remote classes via diverse educational platforms (Fig. 4). Simultaneously, there could be no coordination between the teachers themselves and control by the management

of the educational institution over the workload on students. This problem is still relevant today, as most higher education institutions continue distance learning.

Figure 4 - Resources for remote education.



Source: authors' calculations based on the conducted survey.

Diverse demands of teachers

50% of teachers indicate that not all students attend their classes, which can lead to "decline in academic success" (Huang, 2020). For online education to be successful, it is necessary to provide a clear two-way communication channel between teachers and students (Panev, 2021).

As tools for diagnosing and measuring students' knowledge during online learning, some teachers use oral questioning without preparation time, while others use online testing, individual assignments, option tests, written answers to questions, etc.

55.3% of respondents set a time limit for performing independent tasks. 39.5% do this only for certain types of tasks. 5.3% never set time limits.

39.4% of teachers always allow students to turn off the camera during online classes. 18.4% do not allow turning off the camera during control activities. 5.3% of teachers noted that after identifying a student attending a lecture from a mobile phone, students are allowed to turn off the camera.

34.2% of respondents do not inspect students' work for plagiarism. 44.7% of teachers constantly check for plagiarism and return for revision those works that do not meet the requirements. 10.5% of teachers are happy that in terms of distance learning students somehow complete the tasks.

While most faculty staff (84.2%) claim that there is internal control over the quality of distance learning in their higher education institution, 10.5% have not heard of such control activities or claim their absence (5.3%).

No increased payments to teachers

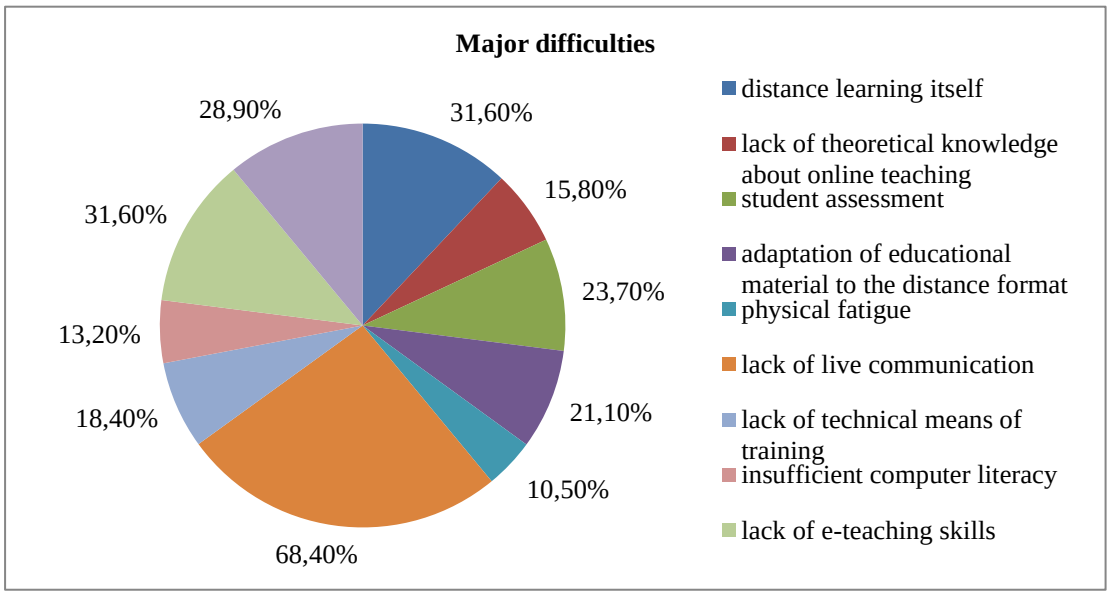
Despite different training formats and excessive workload during quarantine, teachers did not receive any increased payment or bonuses. Left alone with distance education in spring 2020, teachers were forced to spend more time and financial resources to master and implement distance learning techniques on their own.

The survey showed that only 13.2% of teachers use exclusively own learning materials for training students online. 2.6% use materials from the public domain on the Internet. 84.2% combine their personal learning materials with materials found in the Internet.

Other difficulties

Other aspects of distance learning that cause essential difficulties to educators are shown in Fig. 5.

Figure 5 - Major difficulties.



Source: authors' calculations based on the conducted survey.

The questionnaire revealed other shortcomings of online education during quarantine, in particular: insufficient control over the students' learning outcomes; problems with student identification due to the use of a mobile phone or computer without a camera or interruptions in the Internet connection; lack of students' motivation; unwillingness of teachers to readjust to a new teaching format; the inability to see the psychological mood of students; poor internet connection and attempts of students to deceive the teacher; lack of experience and regulatory framework; inadequate practical skills; fatigue from constant use of gadgets; increase in financial costs for Internet use; students' reluctance to study; unavailability of many tools used in face-to-face training; lack of feedback from students; complexity of laboratory work, etc.

Recommendations

Ukraine's education system is encountering global challenges caused by the pandemic, the announcement of quarantine in the country and a mass transition of Ukrainian educational institutions to remote education. Taking into consideration unprecedented uncertainty that was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its likely continuation for a lengthy period of time (Prokopenko & Berezhna, 2020), educational authorities are forced to perform a number of new management actions to support educators in their social, emotional and academic needs (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). These strategies include investing in high-quality educator training to match current needs, socio-psychological support, technical provision and training, coordination and control, academic integrity.

The survey of the teaching staff revealed certain areas that require urgent management decisions.

Appropriate training of faculty members

50% of surveyed teachers believe the age of the teacher significantly affects the effectiveness of distance education. However, only 5.2% of them indicate they are ready to learn and want to be familiar with modern educational technologies. At the same time, most respondents pointed to the primary role of teaching experience in the effectiveness in distance education, claiming that "an experienced teacher is flexible enough to tune in to quality distance work, which, however, does not deny the apparent advantage of offline learning" (Respondent 119); "an experienced teacher selects more optimally

methods, forms and means of work" (Respondent 93); "if a person is an expert, then what difference does it make how to teach" (Respondent 286); "the acquired skills come to the rescue in unforeseen circumstances" (Respondent 54).

Current researches prove that poor faculty acceptance of e-learning technologies, insufficient technical infrastructure and low computer literacy are barriers towards implementation of e-learning. In this perspective, faculties and students should be proficient in IT/Computer skills to respond to academic challenges of the time (Kakepoto et al., 2021).

Socio-psychological support

Nowadays most young people actively utilize the Internet, social networks, forums, chats, etc., so the remote way of perceiving information is common for most students, which in some way explains their motivation for remote learning. However, a significant proportion of teachers are not ready to produce academic content that would be familiar and convenient for students, taking into account the psychological characteristics of remote learning communication, the ability to self-organize and the physical characteristics of perception and assimilation of e-learning content. At the same time, prolonged stay in quarantine in an environment devoid of close social contacts affected both the general psychological state of students and teachers, and the degree of their motivation to perform educational functions.

Educators are transitioning through a particularly uncertain time in terms of their profession and private lives. The move to the online space is presenting considerable hardship as teachers struggle to adapt to what might well be the "new normal" for quite a period of time (Allen et al., 2020). Given this concern, teachers require support during this unprecedented time. Administrators need to provide supportive environments and instructional guidance to teachers to ease anxiety. Support might include instructional, technology, or emotional support (Pressley, 2021). Special trainings and workshops for teachers may prevent burnout, stress development, promote self-regulation and development of time management skills and support their positive emotional state.

Technical provision and training

Efficient distance learning requires considering two urgent problems. The first is that not all students and/or teachers have computers at home (or they are not enough for all family members) and high-speed Internet access. The reality has shown that

not all higher education institutions have been technically prepared (Prokopenko & Berezhna, 2020) and educators were forced to start utilizing their personal computers, laptops, buy other necessary equipment at their own expense, install additional software products, etc. A year after the introduction of quarantine, many classrooms are still unequipped with the necessary equipment (Hmurova & Hrashhenko, 2020), do not have internet, video cameras, microphones, etc., therefore, teachers use their own equipment to broadcast lectures or classes online.

The second problem is caused by insufficient faculty staff training for proving distance education, arranging video conferences, webinars and other educative activities. Only 2.6% of respondents indicated that they received appropriate training for distance education at their university, therefore, prompt training should be provided in all the universities for all faculty members "to become sufficiently adept in navigating the requisite software" (Allen et al., 2020); to arrange the development of e-courses and learning materials. It is immensely beneficial to establish the system of corporate consulting support for teachers to ensure a high quality of education.

Coordination and control

Educational authorities should promptly introduce clear regulations for the functioning of the educational institution and current approaches to the organization of the educational process.

While most educators attempted to maintain the quality of the educational process during the quarantine and invested increased time to prepare for online classes, some teachers transferred communication with students into a written format – sending them written assignments and actually refusing to conduct classes; others did not communicate with students at all. At the same time, the degree of involvement of teachers in distance learning does not affect their salaries.

The situation prioritizes the need for distinct coordination and control of the educational process, monitoring of students' participation in the educational process "to enable the high level of student engagement" (Allen et al., 2020), maintaining control of the online environment (Bhupathy & Nausheen, 2020) and observance of the schedule by teachers.

The number of different digital environments and resources for online and hybrid modes of course delivery need to be unified within one educational institution and be kept to a minimum (Lepp et al.,

2021). Regarding anxiety, educational institutions should provide "clear communication and protocols to help teachers and students feel safe during this outbreak" (Pressley, 2021). It is recommended to gather systematic feedback from the students and faculty members and take it into account while planning and conducting the educational activities and setting up goals (Lepp et al., 2021).

Academic integrity

Despite the fact that in 2017 the concept of academic integrity finally appeared in Ukrainian legislation, and universities were obliged to establish a system for its provision, this issue is still not given enough attention. The findings of the questionnaire are concerning, since less than half of the surveyed educators check students' works for plagiarism. Many teachers are unfamiliar with assessment methods that would make it impossible for students to practice dishonesty. It is imperative that universities work systematically to develop an effective system that will ensure academic integrity.

Conclusions

The education policies and response to COVID-19 must acquire a long-term perspective (Wan, 2020) and, therefore, need to be "strengthened, funded and improved" (Cunha De Araujo, 2020). In this article we described the major challenges and concern in the transition to distance learning. The current results are understandable and prove the urgency of anti-crisis management decisions amed at teachers' support during this unprecedented time. Support might include educational, technology, socio-psychological, financial support, etc. This paper provides recommendations to higher education authorities in Ukraine: provision of supportive environment and instructional guidance, technical provision and training of the faculty members, introduction of clear regulations for the functioning of the educational institution, ensuring academic integrity. Given this, recommendations are applicable to all levels of education system in other countries. These actions are vital for navigating teaching and learning during the pandemic and beyond (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

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