WHAT LESSONS SHOULD BE LEARNT FROM RUSSIAN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EMERGENCY SHIFT TO REMOTE TRAINING WITHIN COVID 19?

Larisa Lutskovskaia

Asst. Prof. Ph.D., RUDN University, Russia, laravas@list.ru

Abstract

COVID -19 has produced a great impact on every aspect of modern human life, including economics, politics, social sphere, education, etc. It refers to every country affected by the pandemic. The education has always been a driving force for the civilization development. Therefore, its sustainability in terms of quality, social inclusion and equal opportunities, psychological support for all those who are subject to the educational process, smooth operation of the infrastructure, etc. have become one of the crucial issues for the overall society, challenges and objectives.

The research materials rest on the results of the surveys that have been conducted in the Russian Federations by various agencies and institutions. The data are currently uploaded in the open access mode in the official Russian digital news platforms.

The surveys covered multifaceted aspects, including the issues of learning materials, on-line class and self-study management, training technologies, digital skills of students and teachers, workload of students and teacher, balance of on-line and face-to-face training, etc.

The consolidated data of the surveys includes reference to over 15 000 students and over 30 000 teachers of Russian Higher education institutions. The surveys were conducted by agencies during 2020.

The research methods combined the analysis of theoretical literature, collection of data on survey results, and their interpretation with regard to the theory of education, human development, and concept of university sustainable development.

The study has made it possible to set forth the recommendations for the higher education management development, for the implementation of university policies during the emergency transition to forms of studies that are not scheduled in the standard curricula.

Keywords: education, COVID 19, education policy and management

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis has introduced significant challenges in almost all spheres of social life including higher education. In the circumstances of pandemic institutions of higher education have been forced to transfer into online mode of learning as an urgent measure. Despite the fact that universities worldwide have been

actively developing online courses and educational programs before COVID-19 pandemic, still the majority of both students and teachers proved to be unprepared to such an urgent move to online education exclusively. Teachers are confronted with various challenges related to psychological difficulties of online communication, lack of relevant experience, skills, and IT competencies necessary to ensure effective online teaching as well as development of teaching material adapted for online teaching. All these factors combined with technical and administrative support of online teaching are crucial for sustainable development of universities thus stipulating the current interest of the present research.

This research aims to analyze both students' and teachers' perception of the emergency shift to remote education caused by COVID-19 pandemic and on the basis of the consolidated data obtained through the surveys formulate recommendations that would contribute to ensuring university policies of sustainable development.

2. CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES

A number of research papers has already been produced on the topic with reference to various national experiences across the globe (Crawford et al. 2020), particular fields of education (Singh et al. 2020), the technology-related issues (Teräs et al. 2020), the role of University communication with various stakeholders during healthcare emergencies (Atabekova 2020).

As far as Russian is concerned, scholars explore shifts in teaching technologies, psychological issues, economic aspects (Gardanova et al. 2020).

However, we consider that a more comprehensive approach is now possible to implement as the Russian universities are running their second academic term of the remote teaching that is not scheduled in the curricula.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methods combined the analysis of theoretical literature, collection of data on survey results, and their interpretation with regard to the theory of education, human development, concept of university sustainable development.

The consolidated data of the surveys includes reference to over 15 000 students and over 30 000 teachers of Russian Higher education institutions. The surveys were conducted by agencies during 2020.

4. MATERIALS FOR RESEARCH

The research materials rest on the results of the surveys that have been conducted in the Russian Federations by various agencies and institutions. The data are currently uploaded in the open access mode in the official Russian digital news platforms.

The surveys covered multifaceted aspects, including the issues of learning materials, on-line class and self-study management, training technologies, digital skills of students and teachers, workload of students and teacher, balance of on-line and face-to-face training, etc.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the consolidated data obtained through surveys conducted among teachers and students we identified several problematic areas that we intend to provide a brief discussion for.

The majority of teachers and students involved in surveys point out that online teaching and learning is more content based rather than communication based. This factor presents some challenges for both sides of the educational process. First of all the teaching materials have to be adequately designed in the way suitable for remote teaching, which necessarily rises the issue of relevant competencies and skills on teachers' part who belong to various age groups. Content based learning requires clear guidance as to the way the material is to be learned as well as planning ahead, which the urgency of shifting to online learning complicated excessively, as teachers had to adjust their courses in the process. The survey data revealed that substantial number of students assess the remote mode of learning as frustrating experience due to confusion about the guidelines which are constantly changing.

One more aspect related to the learning contents is the issue of current and final assessment on the course. The overwhelming majority of teachers who took part in the surveys point out the necessity of thorough rethinking of the traditional approach to classic types of assessment (such as written or oral examinations, project presentations, etc.) as remote mode renders them ineffective.

Many students who volunteered to take part in the surveys point out difficulties associated with online communication. The consolidated data revealed that significant proportion of students feel more isolated within the framework of remote learning, with some minor per cent of those who explicitly declare that they experience psychological barriers in online communication both with teachers and their groupmates especially when the lesson is recorded. Students also tend to regard the teacher as mediator in online communication whose role is to facilitate the learning process not only through monitoring educational activities, but also through providing psychological support to learners.

It should be kept in mind that learning is essentially social activity, the majority of students learn better in the social context rather than isolated. From this perspective timely and personalized teacher's feedback seems of crucial importance. Teacher's feedback may take various forms such as answering a question, providing evaluation of a group project or individual assignment etc. Interaction with the teacher through accurate feedback helps to mitigate negative effects of online communication.

Concerning the issue of online communication, a large proportion of teachers acknowledge that they find it more difficult to manage and control the education process in remote format. Some teachers are concerned that the focus of teachers' attention has moved to proper way of delivery of learning materials in online learning format rather than on ensuring students' actual understanding of it. This fact, in author's opinion, can be attributed to insufficient level of teachers' ICT competence. Due to the emergency of the situation with transition to remote mode of learning caused by pandemic, teacher virtually had no time to build up necessary ICT competence to teach exclusively on line, develop or adapt teaching materials for effective teaching in remote mode. We believe that institutions of higher education can have a significant role in providing technical as well as methodical support to teachers to help them adapt to new teaching environment and thus ensure university sustainable development.

Both students and teachers point out greater degree of learners' independence in comparison with traditional face-to-face education. Students tend to feel more responsible for their learning outcomes, they feel more in control of their studies time and try to manage it accordingly, they can moderate the speed of working on an assignment according to their individual peculiarities. Teachers also note that students appear to be keener on getting teacher's detailed feedback on assignments submitted for evaluation and on overall evaluation of their performance.

However, the issues of educational process discipline also should be kept in mind. Teachers complain that students occasionally see no difference in communication between friendly chats in social networks and chats used for educational purposes provided by such platforms as ZOOM or MS TEAMS and try to engage into too informal style of communication. When working with their cameras off students sometimes use avatar images of cartoon characters or well-known persons instead of their own pictures or just their initials. We believe that clear guidelines and strong position on the part of the university administration is required to curb the above-mentioned practices.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the consolidated data obtained from the extensive surveys of students and teachers' perception of the urgent shift to remote learning made it possible to identify the main problematic areas which include: development of educational content, issues of ICT competence, specificity of online communication. The detailed analysis of the identified areas enabled the author to formulate general recommendations that would contribute to ensuring the sustainability of university development in the turbulent time of COVID-19 pandemic.

Provision of technical support to teachers who do not feel confident with respect to their ICT competences would considerably facilitate the urgent shift to remote training as the only available in the context of the pandemic. It seems to be a perspective practice to organize workshops and seminars for teachers considering their initial level of their ICT competence and pertinence to specific age group.

To develop institution-led methodological guidelines for designing teaching materials specifically adapted for online teaching would contribute to overall enhancement of remote training efficiency.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be of a lasting nature it would be useful to reconsider standard curricula with the view of introducing new formats of teaching.

The provided recommendations are of general nature, however they can be of practical use in identifying university policies and trajectories for overcoming pandemic crises and mitigating its influence.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research have been prepared and carried out with the support of RUDN University program 5 top100.

REFERENCE LIST

- Atabekova, A. (2020). University discourse to foster youth's sustainability in society amidst COVID19: International and Russian Features. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7336.
- Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J., Malkawi, B., Glowatz, M., Burton, R., ... & Lam, S. (2020). COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 3(1), 1-20.
- Gardanova, Z., Ponkratov, V., Kuznetsov, N., Nikitina, N., Dudnik, O., Latypova, E., & Shcherbatykh, S. (2020). A Model for Optimizing the Structure of Teaching Techniques for Distance Learning in the Russian Higher Education System. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 6(4), 147.
- Singh, K., Srivastav, S., Bhardwaj, A., Dixit, A., & Misra, S. (2020). Medical education during the COVID-19 pandemic: a single institution experience. *Indian pediatrics*, 57(7), 678-679.
- Sokolovskaya, I. E. (2020). Socio-psychological factors of studentssatisfaction in the context of digitalization of education during the COVID-19 pandemic and self-isolation. *Digital Sociology*, 3(2), 46-54.
- Teräs, M., Suoranta, J., Teräs, H., & Curcher, M. (2020). Post-Covid-19 education and education technology 'solutionism': A seller's market. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2(3), 863-878.
- Why do students and teachers dislike the distant training (2020, 28 May) *Vedomosty*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/articles/2020/05/28/831354-distantionnoe-obuchenie>
- It is not education, it is self-education (2020, 18 November) *Novaya Gazeta*. Retrieved from: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/11/18/88015-eto-ne-obrazovanie-a-samoobrazovanie>
- Over 70% of Russian Students are satisfied by the technical support of their education during the coronavirus (2020, 27 14 May). *Interfax*. Retrieved from: <https://academia.interfax.ru/ru/news/articles/4717/>
- Students identified major challenges of coronavirus (2020, 19 August). *RBC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/19/08/2020/5f3bbdae9a7947d167de1a41>