

## Student attitude to distance education: Pros and cons

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### Abstract

This article is aimed at identifying the peculiarities of students' attitude to distance education. As a leading method, the questionnaire method was used, which made it possible to identify the students' positive and negative attitudes regarding distance learning more effectively. The article considers students' ideas about distance learning, identifies the positive and negative aspects of the distance learning process. The authors of the article in the process of research revealed that many students of various fields of study are interested in participating in distance courses, but within the framework of mastering a second education. Some students note the usefulness of distance courses, the use of their materials at any time, and the convenience of going back to the materials they have completed at any time to fill in gaps or recall a topic. Some students reported a violation of the educational process in the distance format due to the repeated lack of Internet or its poor quality. Most of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of contact communication in the distance learning process. It is proved that the majority of students believe that distance education will never replace traditional education. Mainly students of technical areas of study gave a negative assessment of the distance education system. It was revealed that students of various fields of study took distance courses that were held in other cities or countries. From the point of view of many students, educational websites have an inconvenient interface.

**Keywords:** distance education, distance courses, students, learning process, pros and cons.

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## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, information technologies, telecommunications, and Internet networks contributed to the development of globalization process in various spheres of human activity. Terms related to the global environment, the global economy, and global education have emerged. In addition, the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, which affected both the economic sphere and the sphere of communication, contributed to the fact that the education of schoolchildren and students switched to a distance format (Aimaletdinov, 2003; Valitov, 1996; Voronina, 1995; Held et al., 2004; Arefyev, 2008; Bayanova et al., 2020; Usak et al., 2020). Everyone has a different attitude to this form of education. Society in a situation of self-isolation has become more dependent on the development of communication channels, means of transmission and exchange of information than on anything else. The process of learning in a distance format has become dependent on Internet technologies (Mikhailov, 2003; Polyakov, 1999; Baydenko, 2002; Cherdymova, 2010, Bayanova et al., 2019; Tameryan et al., 2020). Students listen to lectures in online formats via Internet platforms, perform tasks using a computer and, thus, are increasingly dependent on Internet resources. Modern classical higher education is experiencing a crisis caused by the discrepancy between the requirements of scientific and technological progress and the educational technologies used, as well as the social and economic problems of society, and the demands of modern society correspond to the laws of globalization so environmental education, affordable learning, lower tuition costs are necessary (Alekseeva, 1997; Vanchukhina, 1999; Gromyko, 2002; Cherdymova, 2011; Ratiev, 2007; Sheregi, Dmitriev & Arefyev, 2002; Kvon et al., 2019). As a result, competition between higher education institutions is increasing, both in Russia and abroad. To improve the quality and accessibility of the educational services provided, universities provide information about their teachers, their qualifications, the disciplines they teach, work experience, and similar information to the public, making their universities more attractive to applicants. In addition, various higher education institutions can exchange teachers and developed programs (Zheltukhina et al., 2021). Thus, globalization (economic, information, technological, environmental, cultural), significantly changes the entire educational format, often quite seriously in the direction of expanding distance technologies and Internet education opportunities (Shchedrovitsky, 2007; Kondratieva, 2001; Lukashenko, 2003; Stiglitz, 2003; Wolfson, 1999).

We can confidently say that all agents of scientific and educational activities both within the universities and outside them experience the influence of new civilizational factors. A significant international trend in higher education is the openness of educational resources. In addition, an important skill for distance education of a modern student is his/her ability to register on online platforms and his/her desire to gain new knowledge. However, in all countries and cities, the introduction of distance learning technologies in the learning process is different. Someone actively uses the opportunity to gain knowledge from the world's leading experts, and someone is content with the base that is provided in their educational institution (Bulkin, 2001; Shchetinin, Khromenko & Ryabushkin, 1998; Yuryev, Boldyrev & Zusman, 2003; Slepukhin, 2004).

In addition, despite the mass nature of higher education, it remains a social privilege. The universities of the future must find a balance between the process of globalization, which is rapidly destroying all local isolation, and the need to maintain the stability of the individual and the environment. The following areas of development are possible: the emergence of large universities with numerous branches, or the development of small private elite institutions that work according to individually developed programs and distance themselves from large educational universities.

Thus, the problem relevance lies in the study of distance education phenomenon, since in modern realities classical education is undergoing a time of restructuring and a partial transition to online technologies. This article is aimed at identifying the peculiarities of students' attitude to distance education.

## 2. Materials and Methods

To study the attitude of students to distance education, a questionnaire method was used, which allows us effectively to study the attitude to distance education of students directly involved in the educational process. The sample consisted of 185 students of various faculties (humanities, natural science, technical training) of Moscow State Region University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation and I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University.

The objectives of the study were: to identify the degree of students' awareness about distance education; to find out the attitude of students to distance education; to determine the channels through which students receive information about distance education; to identify how courses organized in a distance format are common in student practice, whether the respondents were students of such courses; to determine which courses particularly did the students belong to; to find out the personal assessment of the courses in which the respondents were participants; to identify the difficulties encountered by the respondents in the course of their experience of participating in distance courses; to determine whether students were ready to study at a distance within the framework of higher education; to find out the students' opinion about the competition between traditional and distance education.

The questionnaire questions were as follows:

What do you know about distance education?

What forms of education do you know?

What sources do you use to get information about distance education?

Have you ever attended any distance learning courses?

Have you ever attended any distance learning courses as part of your studies at a higher education institution?

If you were a participant in distance education as a student, what kind of courses they were?

Do you think that taking these courses was useful for you? What do you see as their usefulness?

How would you assess the quality of these courses (their organization, system of conducting, method of assessment, quality of information provided, and communication problems)?

Tell us what you liked about these courses (their organization, the system of conducting them, the method of assessment, the quality of the information provided, the problems of communication)?

What did you not like (their organization, the system of conducting them, the method of evaluation, the quality of the information provided, the problems of communication)?

If you participated in distance learning courses, what did your participation implied?

What difficulties have you experienced while participating in distance learning?

Are you interested in participating in such courses within the framework of higher education?

The formulation of these questions will allow us to study the peculiarities of students' attitude to distance education and identify possible problems associated with this type of education and outline the prospects for its development from the point of view of students.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Features of Perception of Programs in Youth Policy Context

In the study, one of the tasks was to establish satisfaction with distance education. It is revealed that students feel rather low satisfaction with distance education (76%). No more than half of the students (13%) are fully satisfied with the distance education they receive. Only a part of the surveyed students is ready to recommend the place where they study to their friends. In general, we can say that students are more likely to be dissatisfied with the place where they receive distance education. Every seventh respondent is suspicious of distance education (14%). Within the framework of the study, 80% of respondents believe that distance education will exist in parallel with classical education, 10% believe that distance education cannot be a competitor to classical education, and only 10% believe that distance education is the future.

In the course of the survey, it turned out that the attitude to distance education mainly depends on the course of study and the type of direction of students' study. Thus, students of the natural science and humanistic fields of study, in general, reacted positively to the introduction of distance learning into the education system (68%). Most of the students surveyed consider distance education an acceptable form of education and note that this type of education will allow students to study in a relaxed environment, which contributes to a better consolidation of knowledge. At the same time, students of the natural science and humanities areas of study (56%) note that due to the large number of applicants to enter a particular educational institution and the limited places for admission, with the introduction of distance education, it becomes possible to accept all those who are willing and able to acquire knowledge in this form. Among the responses of students (23%), the idea is expressed that the introduction of distance education will not allow you to spend a lot of time and money on a trip to an educational institution, since many students live at a considerable distance from the place of study. Some participants of the questionnaire, studying in the humanities, note such an advantage of distance education as the possibility of combining training with some other activity (68%). Many students who receive a liberal arts education, mainly undergraduates, note that distance education opens up great opportunities for students from other cities and countries, since students cannot leave their place of residence and still to receive higher education (32%). Among the junior students who receive knowledge in the natural sciences and humanities, it was also suggested that distance education will help to educate students in self-organization (71%), since a student, studying remotely becomes more independent, organized, mobile and responsible.

The negative attitude of students of the natural science and technical fields of study was not noticed; however, 3% of students express the opinion that the introduction of distance education will not develop students' communication skills with peers and teachers, as well as some important personality traits.

Mostly, the negative reaction to the introduction of distance education was seen from students of technical areas of study. Thus, students of technical areas of study noted (46%) that with the introduction of distance education, students will not receive the necessary practical skills. In addition, some students of technical fields of knowledge, mainly junior courses, note that in modern times, students are not particularly organized (88%), so with the introduction of distance education, additional motivation of students to study will be required. Many students of technical areas of study express their opinion about the socialization that a student receives by studying in the traditional education system

(73%). At the same time, some students (3%) express the opinion that distance education will contribute to the problem of student identification.

Among the opinions of students of technical areas of study, a positive attitude to the introduction of distance education is noted only in 10%. Most students of both natural science, humanities, and technical fields of study of different courses of study are familiar with distance education 100%. Students of the humanities also noted that distance learning is one of the most promising areas for the development of higher education in the world (97%). It should be noted that senior courses students studying in technical areas of study know the same forms of distance education as students of natural science and humanities - computer programs, including tests, simulators, textbooks, workshops, trainings and laboratory works (100%). Among the junior courses students of the technical fields of study, none of the respondents notes any special information about distance education.

In addition, among the forms of distance education, almost all respondents (99%) know such as obtaining secondary and higher education, advanced training courses, courses for preparing for various exams and tests, courses for developing certain skills and personal qualities. Some of the students (1%), mostly studying in technical professions, do not know that secondary education is also possible through distance learning. Some students of the humanities (3%) noted that there are currently no reliable, high quality, scientific and educational distance learning sources that are constantly being developed, filled in and updated. At the same time, students of natural sciences and humanities (56%) claim that many educational websites have an inconvenient interface. Many survey participants express the opinion that they have never been specifically interested in distance education channels before the quarantine was announced, however, they would be interested in using these sites and trying to take distance education.

Students of different fields of study who had to be a listener of educational distance courses and students who never used distance learning before the announcement of the pandemic occupy approximately the same position. Among the students who received distance education, it is noted that the teachers of their educational institutions conducted both lectures and seminars in remote form. Some of the students of various fields of study (12%) note that they had completed independent distance learning even before the announcement of the coronavirus pandemic. Almost half of the students of the natural science and humanities fields of study note that they had never used any distance learning courses before the announcement of the coronavirus pandemic. Many of those students of technical fields of study who claim to be students of educational distance courses, receive additional professional training in their specialty

Among the responses of the survey participants, participation in such additional distance courses as training in law and design is expressed. All students of various fields of study who have noted participation in distance learning find it useful. Among students of the humanities, it is suggested that the usefulness of distance learning is shown in the convenience of the schedule, since it frees up enough time for other classes. In addition, some students noted the usefulness of distance courses, the possibility to use of their materials at any time. In addition, some students noted the usefulness of distance courses, the use of their materials at any time. They talk about the convenience that at any time you can go back to the materials you have passed to fill in the gaps or remember the topic. However, 2% of the senior students expressed a negative opinion about taking distance courses.

Students of various fields of study, speaking about the usefulness of distance learning, once again stressed the lack of need to get to an educational institution. Many of the survey participants took distance courses that were held in other cities and countries. In this regard, they note that distance courses have become an open opportunity for them to gain various knowledge. There was also a

negative opinion on the part of students of technical areas of study regarding the passage of distance courses. The students also expressed the opinion that the educational process in the distance format was repeatedly disrupted due to the lack of Internet or its poor quality, and therefore they had a negative attitude towards distance courses. The opinion was also expressed that according to the traditional education system, teachers provided information in an even amount, while the situation in the distance education system is different. In addition, the majority of students noted that when studying in the distance format, they experienced a lack of communication, which caused them to develop a bad mood and even feel bad. Some of the survey participants who did not try to take distance education before the announcement of the coronavirus pandemic noted their inability to use programs that provide distance courses. According to the responses of the majority of students in various fields of study, we can judge the average quality of distance courses.

It was suggested that during the distance learning, the teacher was constantly distracted by remarks in the chat that were not related to the training material, which also indicates the poor organization of the course. In addition, the survey participants noted that it took much time to wait for paid distance courses, and even, the payment was already made, however, it was necessary to wait a few days to start the distance learning process. Students of various fields of study noted the problems of communication in the process of learning in a distance format. Despite the disadvantages expressed, some students also noted the positive qualities of passing distance courses. Students of various fields of study noted the atmosphere of distance courses, the ease of communication and the good mood of all participants of the courses. Students of technical areas of study noted that distance learning allowed them to systematize old knowledge and get new ones. According to the students' responses, some students of various fields of study are interested in participating in distance courses within the framework of higher education. No one expressed negative opinions on this issue; however, 12% of students said that they were interested in participating in distance courses only in the framework of a second or additional higher education.

#### **4. Discussion**

However, along with these undeniable advantages, the informatization of education leads to a certain unification of national education systems, and also puts them under the influence of universal educational models developing on the basis of the global Internet. Despite the contradictory attitude to the development of distance education in the modern world, and, in particular, in the field of higher professional education, the majority of interested persons (teachers, students, potential consumers of services) consider it necessary to introduce new forms and technologies of training, but mainly at the stage of obtaining a second higher education or advanced training. Limitations in the use of distance learning technologies are mainly associated with the need for financial support, methodological and personnel support, as well as with the high role of consciousness, motivation and readiness for change and development of students and teachers involved in distance learning.

A similar situation can be traced with the regulatory and legal regulation in the processes of creating and using electronic educational resources and educational publications. The lack of legally established standards of distance learning for students in higher education leads to different, and often ineffective, concepts of e learning in universities: "each university supports different concepts of e-learning.

The transition to online education entails the accessibility and massification of higher education, caused by its significant reduction in price, which, on the one hand, eliminates the problem of unequal access to education, but on the other, inevitably leads to a decrease in the quality of university education. This is partly due to the popularity of the open educational model, which is characterized by such features as changing the nature of higher education from elite to mass; establishing close contacts

between universities and business; widespread computerization and informatization of education; increasing demand for higher education while increasing the level of its availability.

Opinions were divided on the issue of the displacement of classical education: from its complete replacement by distance education to their coexistence in different ratios. The most common view is that of mixed education. A small part of the respondents believe that nothing will change in the field of higher education due to the need to invest significant funds, the lack of a regulatory framework, the inertia of the teachers' thinking, the difficulties of controlling the receipt of education by the declared people, and so on. Students expressed a positive opinion about distance learning. Many students of technical fields of study are interested in participating in distance courses as part of their second education. Most students of various fields of study believe that distance education cannot be a competitor to traditional education. Among students of various fields of study, opinions are also mainly directed towards the fact that distance education will never replace traditional education.

## 5. Conclusions

This new form of education is rapidly entering life, affecting the existence and preservation of traditional classical higher education. Given the existence of both obvious advantages and obvious disadvantages of distance education, the debate about the feasibility of this form and the threat it poses to traditional education does not stop, and therefore it is relevant to study the opinions of persons directly related to higher education - teachers and students. Thus, it can be said that the opinions of junior students of various fields of study in higher educational institutions were divided in the direction of traditional education and distance learning.

Students who receive education in the natural science and humanities areas of study generally respond positively to the introduction of distance education. Mainly students of technical areas of study observed a negative assessment of the distance education system. The majority of students who were trained in the distance format had a negative attitude towards distance education. There is a smaller proportion of those students who find taking distance courses useful. For students of technical fields of study, distance education seems to be less useful than for students of natural science and humanities. During the survey, many students showed interest in distance education and noted that they would definitely try to take any distance education courses in addition to the education they receive.

In general, one should note that students not always accept the introduction of distance learning in the educational process since it is new phenomenon for them.

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