

Study of Satisfaction with the Organization of the Studying Process in Remote Mode during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Case UrFU named after the First President of Russia B.N.Yeltsin

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Abstract.

Research background: The current situation in the country and the world related to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on almost spheres of human life including Education which have undergone total functional changes. The key aspects of the transition to remote learning are: monitoring the process of remote learning and feedback from students; technical and competence-based equipment of the educational process; the organization, format and quality of training; self-organization of educational activities and its effectiveness.

Purpose of the article: To study the strengths and weaknesses, of the activities for the transition to remote learning mode in order to develop technologies to improve these processes if there is a need for them in the future.

Methods: The tools of empirical sociological research are based on the author's questionnaire, structured in blocks in accordance with the key aspects of the transition to remote learning. Respondents: students of Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin.

Findings & Value added: Strengths include technical equipment and respondents' digital competence. The weak points include the general methodological unavailability to study remotely, namely, the development and implementation of educational tasks; shortcomings in supporting the learning process by the Department/Dean's office/teachers; the inability of students to self-organization and self-control. The main recommendations include the need to develop digital competencies of respondents, mastering self-management technologies; creating digital studying methodical complex of disciplines in parallel with traditional studying ones; mastering digital communication without losing the content and meaning of training and education.

Keywords: *COVID-19 pandemic; higher education; studying process in remote mode; digital competencies; quality of education*

JEL Classification: *I21; I23*

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1 Introduction

The current situation in the country and the world related to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on all spheres of human life. Education is one of the main areas that have undergone total functional changes. The global nature of the pandemic has hit universities hard. As Tufan et al [1] notify, 'The most important topic for universities during the pandemic was of course distance and remote learning, which become widespread already. The pandemic will cause profound impacts and changes on the higher education system around the world in terms of education-teaching methods, research, internationalization and mobility'.

As in any other sphere of life, education has experienced specific problems due to the pandemic.

The main of them is adaptation to "new reality" in the wide context.

Digital adaptation, as expected, has become the most serious challenge for education. It was with this problem that the majority of lecturers and students had to face during the transition to remote learning.

According to Tran et al [2], that digital literacy and resilience are crucial to navigate the digital world as much as the real world what requires serious investment to create a secure digital educational environment to improve digital literacy. Digitalization of studying processes and the transition to distance learning in digital format has forced higher education institutions to urgently create online courses, including mass ones, in order to provide up-to-date training of specialists, followed by an immediate assessment of the quality of training.

Major world-famous universities in developed countries and local universities in developing countries have followed this path of transformation [3,4,5 etc.].

One of research in Great Britain [6] showed that during the pandemic period the equivalent of a ten-year digital learning strategy was achieved in mere months, which opens up new pedagogical opportunities arising from the "digital turn".

Despite the fact that virtual learning is becoming very important, being the main route for teaching students today and the degree of introduction of mobile devices for learning during the pandemic has increased to 70 % of the population coverage, the prospects for digitalization of education cause many problems that must be solved in the near future.

For example, when switching to remote learning, universities have started using various online platforms (moodle, classroom, hypermethod, etc.), but the consequences of this transition are not always transparent. For example, the barriers to online learning that students face are described by Octaberlina and Muslimin [7]. The results of their research showed that students experienced three barriers during online learning including unfamiliarity of e-learning, slow internet connection, and physical condition e.g. eye strain.

An equally important aspect of adaptation during a pandemic is the adaptation of participants in the learning process, including lecturers and students, especially the last ones.

An equally important aspect of adaptation during a pandemic is the adaptation of participants in the learning process, especially students. This also applies to various forms of support for students both from the administrative bodies of the University (Dean's office, Department), from the service services (library), and from teachers who provide professional training.

By the opinion of Christian et al [8], during this transition, students had to adjust while attempting to construct meaning amidst myriad of pandemic related challenges.

Neuwirth et al [9] showed that the coronavirus (COVID-19) has required faculty and students to adapt to an unprecedented challenge and rapidly transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to distance learning formats through virtual classrooms. While most

campuses trained faculty to ensure quality and maintenance of the curriculum through virtual classrooms, less consideration has been given to training students, who face equal challenges in adapting to this abrupt change in the delivery of the curriculum.

The motivation to studying dropped among the students. This trend is undoubtedly huge since the transition to a remote/distance education mode has affected everyone. Large assignments, the opportunity to spend more time at home and go about their own business, low level of control or its absence from both parents and lecturers — all these reduced the level of motivation to studying.

The degree of involvement in the educational process decreased with the announcement of the pandemic. This can be attributed to the fact that most of the students perceived the quarantine as an unplanned rest, or they simply did not have the opportunity to carry out the educational process for other reasons.

It is also important to emphasize that changes in the learning environment have updated the importance of such individual personal characteristics as self-organization and self-control as important resources in determining the level of student engagement in the learning process. Particularly, Ghazali et al [10] investigate the effects of COVID-19 on students' performance based on their learning habits.

One should take into consideration such an important criterion of education estimation as quality of received knowledge. Reliable statistical analysis and more accurate predictions and estimates can be made after we see the first results of the school year and come closer to the new "normality". But we cannot deny the fact that the overall quality will undoubtedly deteriorate. Quite a logical justification for this is, at least, the fact that control over the progress in mastering educational programs has worsened. Perhaps, the remote format does not allow it to be done properly.

All these factors influence the overall satisfaction of education which has significantly decreased as expected due to the pandemic and transition to online learning mode.

Thus, the key aspects of the transition to remote learning are: monitoring the process of remote learning and feedback from students; technical and competence-based equipment of the educational process: the availability of communication tools digital competencies; the organization, format and quality of training; self-organization of educational and pedagogical activities and its effectiveness; advantages and disadvantages of learning in remote mode, as well as factors that affect them.

2 Methodology

The purpose of the study: to study the strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages of the activities for the transition to remote learning mode in order to develop technologies to improve these processes if there is a need for them in the future.

Methods: The tools of empirical sociological research are based on the author's questionnaire, structured in blocks in accordance with the key aspects of the transition to remote learning.

Key survey's block included follow aspects:

- monitoring the process of remote learning and feedback from students;
- technical and competence-based equipment of the educational process: the availability of communication tools of digital competencies;
- the organization, format and quality of training;
- self-organization of educational and pedagogical activities and its effectiveness;
- advantages and disadvantages of learning in remote/distance mode, as well as factors that affect them.

Respondents: students of Ural Federal University named after the first President of

Russia B. N. Yeltsin.

3 Results

The results of the research allowed us to identify the following trends.

Block 1 - Monitoring the process of distance learning and feedback from students:

A) the majority (75%) of students report that the *dean's office as a whole timely notifies about changes*, but does so with a slight delay (48%). (Fig. 1) At the same time, half of the students (50%) report that they *periodically need additional support when learning remotely*. (Fig.2)

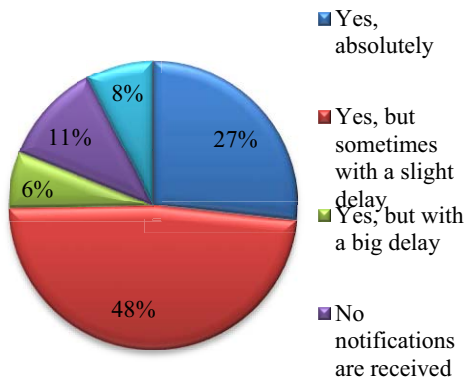


Fig. 1. Timeliness of informing students.

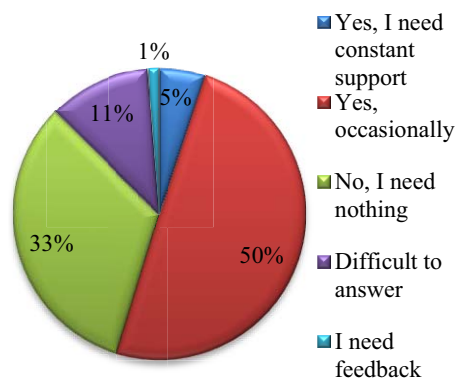


Fig 2. The students' necessity for additional dean's office support in distance learning process.

B) *Desired type of support: consultations with lecturers* (Fig.3)

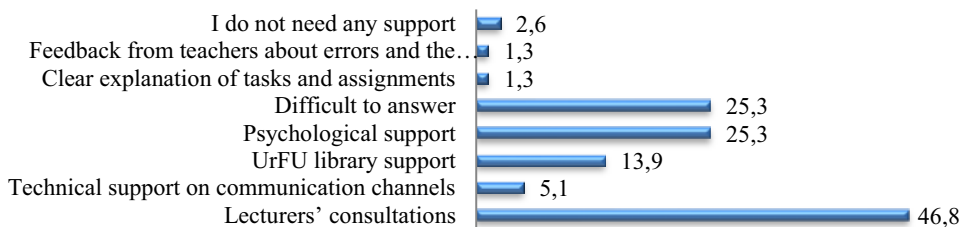


Fig. 3. Students' preferred types of distance learning support.

Block 2 - Technical and competence-based equipment of the educational process: the availability of communication tools digital competencies:

A) The majority of the respondents are *fully equipped with means of communication* - 70% (Fig. 4), as well as they possess a sufficient digital competencies for learning using such means (Fig. 5)

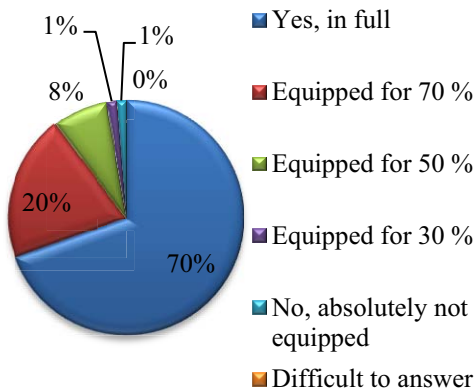


Fig. 4. Students' equipment with communication gadgets.

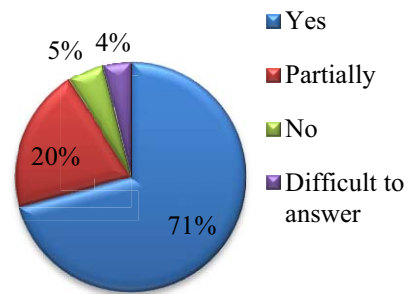


Fig. 5. Students' possession of digital competencies necessary for distance learning.

B) The most popular *means of communication for distance learning is a computer*; 86% of respondents said this. The second most popular answer is the smartphone - 8%. (Fig. 6)

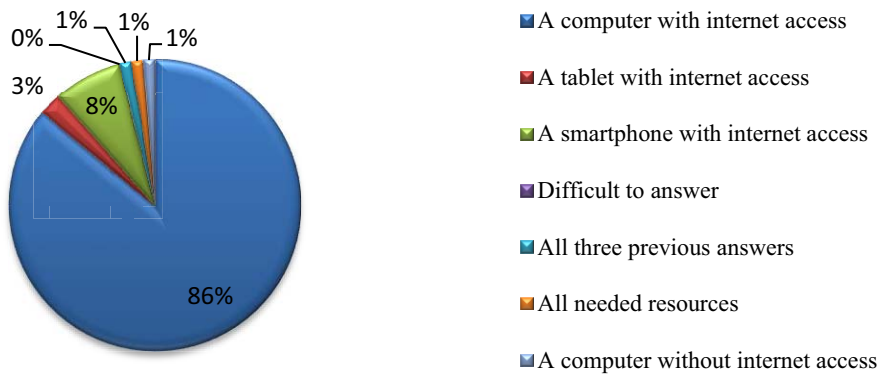


Fig. 6. Means of communication used by students during distance learning.

Block 3 - The organization, format and quality of training:

A) Despite the fact that *a transition to a remote learning mode* was unconditionally approved *only by 25 %* of students (Fig. 7), in general, the transition was carried out without special difficulties. (Fig. 8)

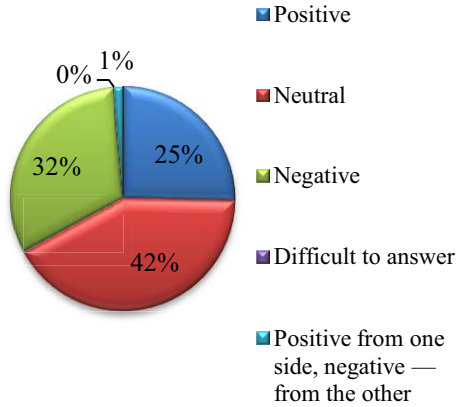


Fig. 7. Degree of student approval of the transition to distance learning format

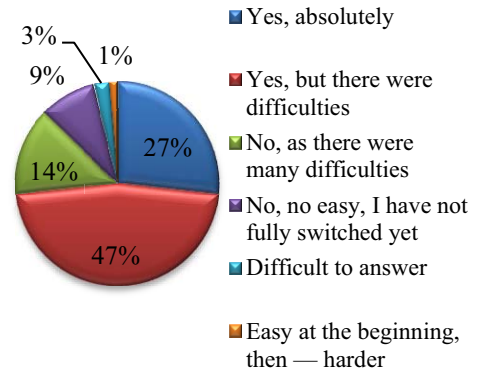


Fig. 8. The degree of complexity of the transition to distance learning format.

B) Only about 40 % of students are generally satisfied with the organization of distance learning, less than 30 % have a positive attitude to distance learning, whereas more than 40 % do not approve of such learning format. (Fig. 9)

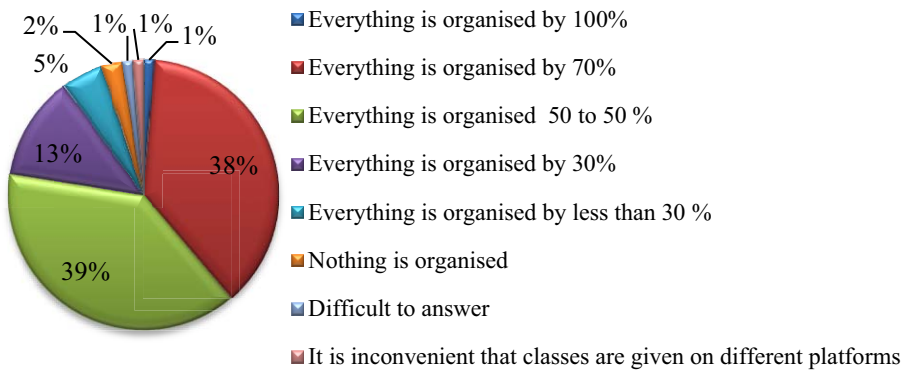


Fig 9. Student assessment of distance learning organization.

C) As for the *dynamics of the quality of education*, almost half (38%) of students report deterioration in various degrees (from mild to significant); a third (31%) of respondents report the preservation of the quality of training in a remote learning mode, and only 16% note an increase in the quality of training. (Fig. 10)

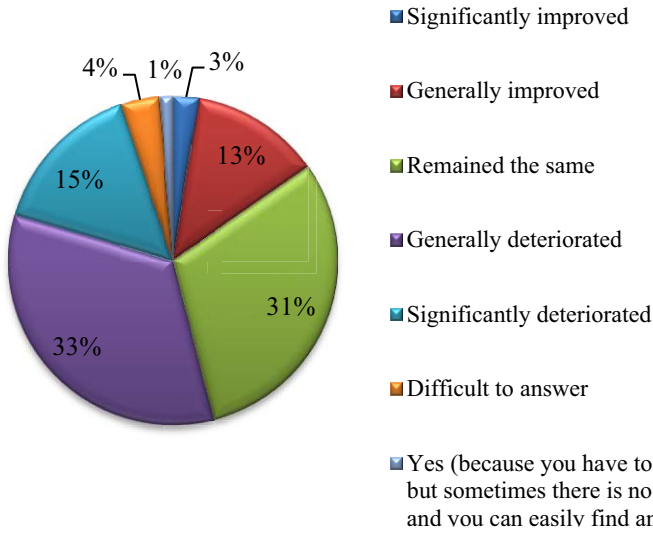


Fig. 10 Assessment of the dynamics of the quality of education in a remote format. (Source: own research, May 2020)

Block 4 - Self-organization of educational and pedagogical activities and its effectiveness:

A) Significant changes also affected *the process of completing home assignment*, both in terms of time and its completeness. (Fig. 11a, 11b) The majority of students (82%) began to spend more time on assignments (Fig. 11a) and only 38% manage to complete them, 20% cannot complete on time at all, 38% partially cannot complete on time. (Fig. 11b)

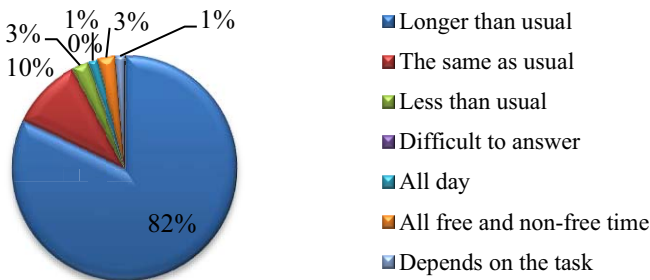


Fig. 11a. Assessment of the length of time to complete the assignments.

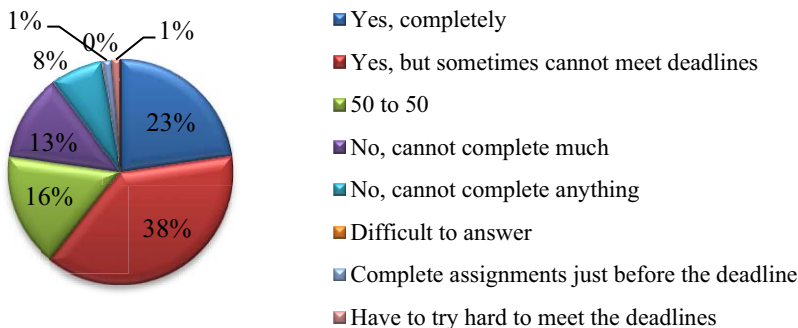


Fig. 11 b. Assessment of the completeness of the assignments.

B) More than 75% of students are more or less engaged in *planning their educational activities*. However, in general, planning is carried out for the upcoming week. (Fig. 12)

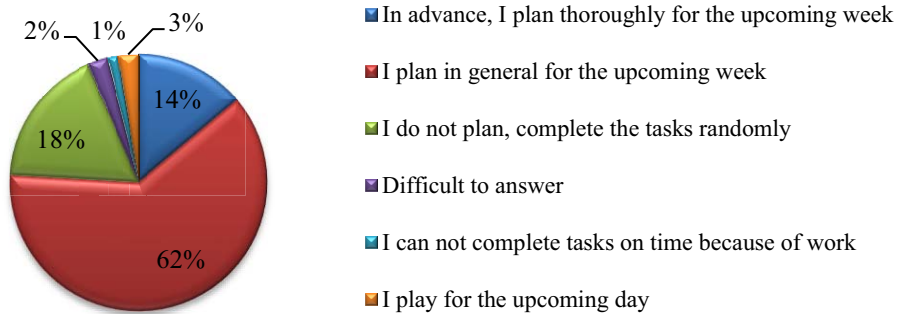


Fig. 12. Planning of educational activity.

C) *The rating of the reasons for the success of education based on self-organization is shown in Fig. 13. The main ones are internal reserves of personality.*

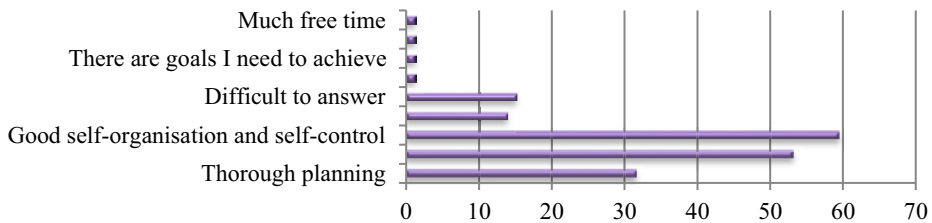


Fig. 13. Students' assessment of the reasons for progress.

D) *The rating of reasons for academic failure is presented in Fig.14.*

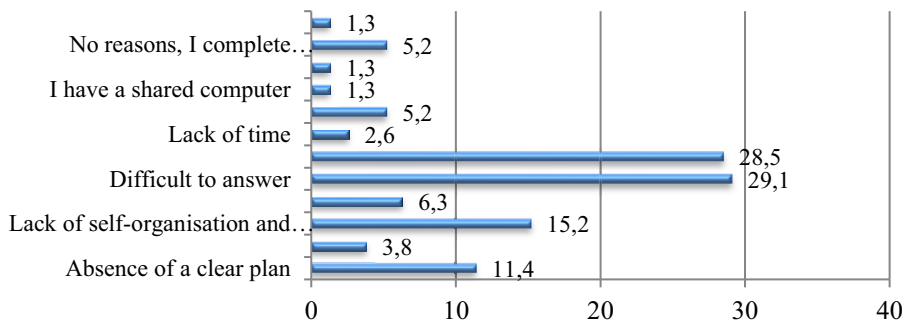


Fig. 14. Students' assessment of the reasons for academic failure.

Block 5 - Advantages and disadvantages of learning in remote mode, as well as factors that affect them:

A) *The basic difficulties in the transition to distance learning are associated with the large volume of homework, studying a large amount of information on your own, controlling the deadlines, lack of communication with lecturers, organizing the time for completing assignments, difficulties in completing homework.* (Fig. 15)

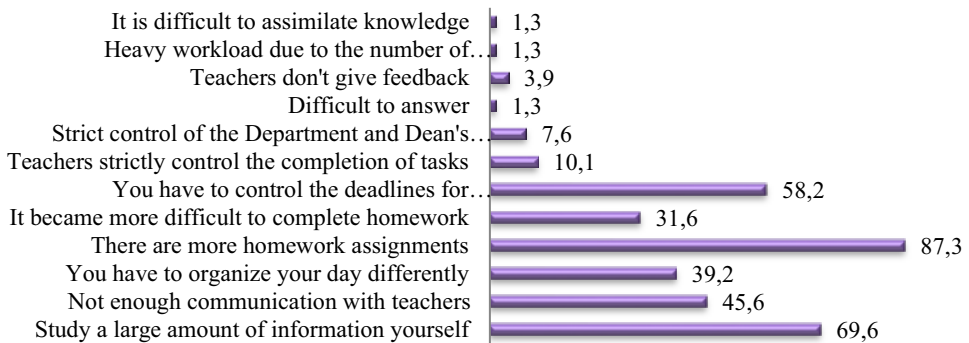


Fig. 15. Assessment of disadvantages in distance learning format.

B) *The main advantages of distance learning* are associated with working times, namely: the choice of a convenient time and balance of work and rest. (Fig. 16)

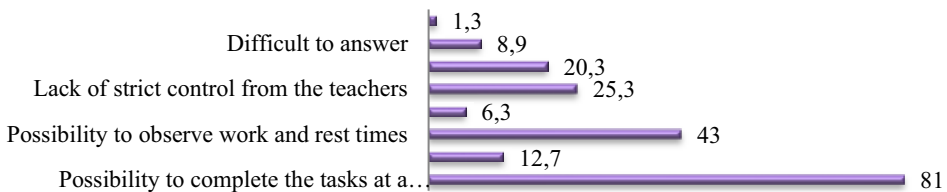


Fig. 16. Assessment of advantages in distance learning format. (Source: own research, May 2020)

C) *The presence of distracting from learning factors* is noted by 67% of students, these mainly include those related to ensuring proper learning conditions. (Fig. 17)

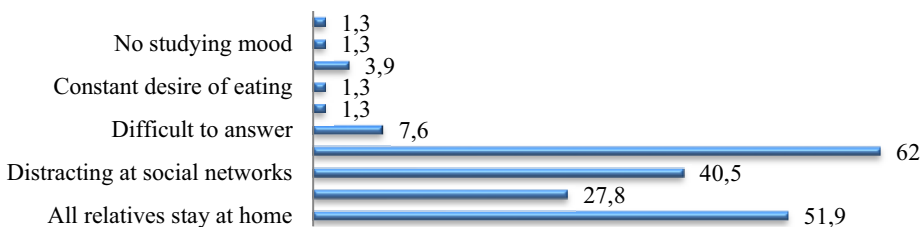


Fig. 17. Assessment of the distracting factors. (Source: own research, May 2020)

4 Discussion and conclusion

The conducted study allowed us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the process of organizing and implementing distance learning in the context of the constraints caused by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

The strengths are: a high level of technical readiness of both students and administrative services of the university.

Weaknesses: general methodical unreadiness to use digital learning tools, namely:

- availability of tasks in the mode of digital learning tools;
- disadvantages of supporting the learning process by the department / dean's office / teachers;
- inability of students to self-organize and self-control in the process of distance learning,

The following general recommendations are offered:

- 1) develop digital competencies of both teachers and students to teach and study respectively remotely if necessary;
- 2) master self-management technologies;
- 3) create digital educational and methodological complexes (EMC) of disciplines along with traditional EMC;
- 4) master digital communication without losing the content and meanings of learning and education.

The testing of the new format of education made us think about how we could improve the distance format, modernize it and implement it in the future.

We support the terrific productive ideas of Quezada et al [11], who define five prospective themes of design of modern transformations: technology-based instructional strategies; technology-based support office consultation; alternative technology-based course assessments; feedback for learning and teaching improvement; and social-emotional engagement in courses, and support of placement that were found to be essential to transitioning to remote/online teaching.

All stakeholders in the educational process - students, teachers, and University administrators-should participate in these processes.

Zalite and Zvirbule [12] indicate; “Nowadays, students expect that their university will not only provide a valuable source of practical knowledge for them, but will also be ready to offer appropriate distance learning opportunities both on a daily basis to diversify and enrich the study process experience and during global pandemic crises, which will probably be the reality of their lives in the next decades.”

From the other side, as Octaberlina and Muslimin [13] point out, students had to be creative to find any solutions and innovations regarding learning barriers including maintaining good communication with teacher and understanding the best learning styles individually.

By opinion of Neuwirth et al [14], initiating a meaningful dialogue between faculty, who are engaged in efforts to cope and adapt to the pandemic, may prove useful in re-envisioning and re-designing future curriculum. This may facilitate future discussions on creating best practices guidelines for asynchronous/synchronous virtual classrooms post the pandemic.

University’s administration should organize a special organizational environment to support “new digital educational reality”, including different services, such as the continuity of library services and collections access. For example, ‘leveraging and expanding existing online services and digital collections, and acquiring or building new research tools for scholars to deploy, are two approaches the University of Toronto Libraries’ staff have taken since the COVID-19 changed library operations’. [15]. Mahmood [16] underlines, that there are multiple factors that help in enhancing remote learning. These factors include getting feedback from students, offering flexible teaching and assessment policies. Recording online lectures and getting support from teaching assistants are also vital features. These instructional strategies will serve as an excellent tool in running online classes. Stukalo and Simakhova [17] recommend: “University’s management should provide constant monitoring of the satisfaction of students and lecturers of the online education organization for the accumulation of statistical data in the dynamics”.

All this measures, as conclude Raaper and Brown [18], are essential to avoid regression in widening participation policies and practices, and to promote inclusive university environments.

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