

# The experience of distance learning in the bologna process countries during the COVID-19 pandemic

Zarina R. Bitieva , Maria A. Bulavina, Zalina R. Bitieva\*

NANO HE Institute of World Civilizations, Leninsky Prospekt, 1 / 2k1, Moscow, Russia

**Abstract.** In this article, the authors analyze various aspects of the distance learning discourse of the countries participating in the Bologna Process from the point of view of the impact of the pandemic on the development of higher education. The author pays special attention to the practical aspects of the activities of Russian universities during the pandemic, their interaction with each other and the problems of cooperation in the context of distance learning. Naturally, the stress caused by the epidemic and the transition to distance learning, especially for senior teachers, could not but affect the quality of training, but competently and professionally selected materials provided students with an educational result, and teachers with positive feedback and opportunities for self - development. The aim of the article is to demonstrate the experience of distance learning in the context of the pandemic and its impact on the higher education system. The author used the following methods: comparative research; methods of collecting empirical information; conceptual and terminological analysis; a method for solving problems. The results of the study can certainly be considered as revealing the positive dynamics of the development of the Bologna process in the higher education system, especially in the context of the pandemic.

## Introduction

In 2019, the world community as a whole and the countries participating in the Bologna Process in particular, faced a serious problem-the coronavirus pandemic (COVID - 19). Education systems around the world were forced to take measures to organize the educational process in difficult, unexpected conditions associated with the introduction of a self-isolation regime. The emergency transition to distance learning was accompanied by problems of such a nature as: insufficient technical equipment, lack or poor training of teachers and students for the new format of work. At the same time, along with new challenges, the new format of education has brought new opportunities for self-development into our lives, provided a wide range of prospects for changing and improving educational systems. The Bologna education system has also not been left out of these

---

\*Corresponding Author. Email: [zalinabitieva@gmail.com](mailto:zalinabitieva@gmail.com)

changes. In general, the Bologna Process can be interpreted as a process of internationalization of higher education, and at the same time, digitalization in all spheres of life, which is becoming especially relevant in today's realities.

The study and analysis of this issue is based on the data and conclusions of a large array of publications that are devoted to both the pandemic itself and the improvement of the higher education system. As part of the article, the authors also conducted a survey of students of Russian universities in order to identify the problems they faced during the period of self-isolation and transition to a distance learning format. At the same time, the authors studied the normative legal acts regulating distance learning in Russia [1, 2, 3].

First of all, it is necessary to determine the very concept of "distance learning". Based on the analysis of pedagogical literature, we give such a definition: under distance learning refers to educational activities using distance learning technologies involving the use of information and telecommunications infrastructure for the transmission of information and mediated synchronous or asynchronous interaction of students and teachers [5].

## **Materials and Methods**

The methodological basis for the implementation of this work was some general scientific research methods, among which it is necessary to distinguish research, collection of empirical information, methods of comparative research, conceptual and terminological analysis, as well as the problem method and selective observation. The use of this set of methods will allow us to form a reliable assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the higher education system in Russia. The developed methodological tools will create a basis for a more in-depth scientific study of the consequences of the epidemic's impact on the level of education. The methodology developed in the scientific article will be adapted to take into account the use of a reliable statistical database of publicly available sources.

## **Results**

It is important to note that the transition to the distance learning format in different countries participating in the Bologna Process did not take place with the same success and was characterized by some difficulties within each individual country. Among the difficulties that prevent effective learning in distance format in Russia, according to a survey among the students of Russian universities are the following: problems with reliable Internet connection, access to digital devices or their fault, and no comfortable place for studying at home and lack an adequate level of intrinsic motivation among students, the need for an external control of the teacher.

Thus, 20% and 35% of the surveyed students faced the problem of reliable Internet connection and technical difficulties, respectively. This problem especially affects the settlements of the Russian Federation located in mountainous areas, for example, in such republics as North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia.

According to the results of the 2018 PISA study, which involved 79 education systems of countries and individual regions, in Russia about 90% of students have a comfortable place to study at home [6]. Despite the results of these studies, 25% of respondents expressed their indignation at the transition to distance learning due to the lack of comfortable conditions for obtaining education outside the walls of educational institutions.

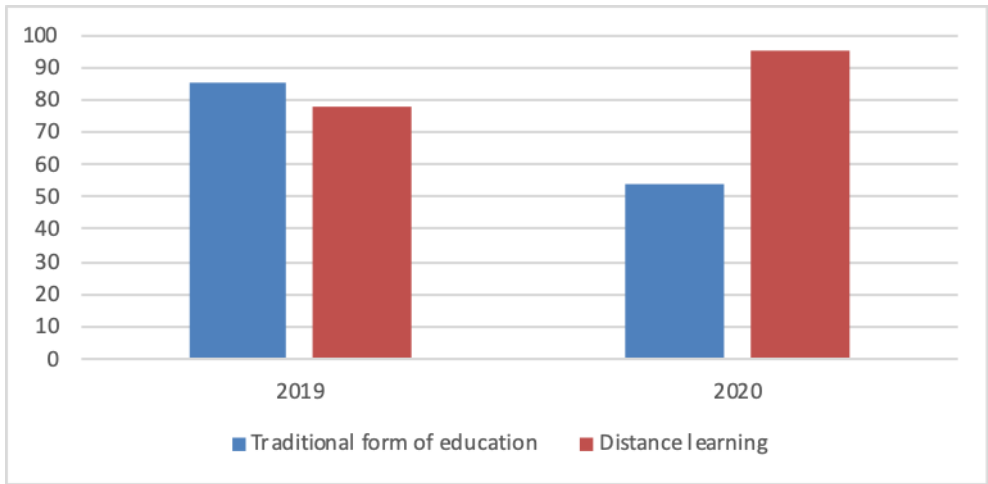
As for the lack of a sufficient level of internal motivation among students, 58% of respondents believe that external control significantly increases motivation to learn. That is,

without the guidance and support of a teacher, students will not be able to effectively navigate the world of distance learning, especially in medical educational institutions.

It is also important to note that in addition to the availability of electronic educational systems and platforms, it is also necessary to ensure that teachers have technical and pedagogical skills in the field of digital technologies. For example, the Institute of World Civilizations (Moscow) uses an electronic information and educational environment (EIE), in which almost 100% of the teaching staff of the Institute were trained under the additional professional training program "Electronic information and educational environment in higher education" in the amount of 72 hours of training. The EIE includes more than 6.2 terabytes of information, including 1750 methodological developments, 2.3 million test questions to control students' knowledge, 9654 materials for practical classes, 6271 materials for lectures, 1425 presentations, and all of them are placed in a single ordered system. The system also hosts more than 378 e-books, the system is connected to EBS ipr-books and U-wright, 1521 video lessons, including in Russian and English. According to the results of a survey of students, distance learning was approved by 77% of students (the main share was made up of students from other regions of Russia). At the same time, in order to organize the educational process for online events, the ZOOM platform is actively used. The convenience of this platform was appreciated by 100 % of the surveyed students, as well as teachers and administrative staff, who especially appreciated the convenience of monitoring class attendance by both students and teachers, as well as archiving classes by recording conferences. In addition, there are many other platforms that implement the possibilities of distance education .

In addition to the identified problems and difficulties caused by distance learning, there are also concerns for the psychological and physical health of students in distance learning. President of the "League of patients", expert of Russian Academy of Sciences, member of Expert Council under the Government of the Russian Federation Alexander Saversky appealed to the Prosecutor General and the FSB, citing the results of a study conducted by the Institute of hygiene and health of children and adolescents FGAU "SMRC children's health" Russian Ministry of health. The study was conducted from April 27 to May 26, 2020 and was called "The well-being of schoolchildren in distance learning during the COVID-19 epidemic". According to the results of the study, 80% of students as a result of isolation and distance learning found dysfunctional mental reactions.

However, in addition to the negative consequences, it is important to note the positive consequences of learning in a crisis situation. The search for new ways of organizing training helps to stimulate creative decisions of teachers. As noted by more than half of the surveyed students – 58%, classes have become more interesting and informative. Since interactive-cognitive games have become actively used, which in turn contributes to improving the assimilation of the material by students. According to testing first-year students in the first semester, with the analysis of test results of first-year students last year, this year the results are much better. In addition to improving results, students' attendance increased, and interest in lectures and practical classes increased due to two factors: first, classes became more interesting, and secondly, students have more free time to prepare for classes due to the distance learning format, since they do not need to spend time on the way to the institute. The results obtained by the team of authors demonstrate an increase in the attendance of full-time students in the distance learning format, which is displayed in Figure 1.



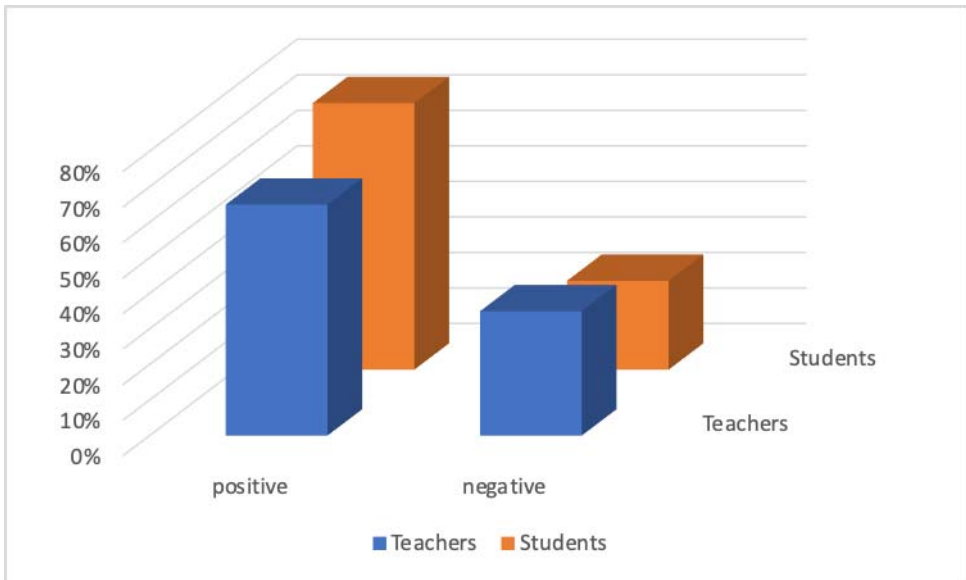
**Fig. 1.** Dynamics of attendance of classes by full-time students of the Institute of World Civilizations

Observations showed that students began to actively attend classes in 2020 compared to 2019. Of course, the presence of a student in an online class does not always indicate their willingness to actively participate in the learning process. Theoretically, it can be just online, while doing their own business by turning off the video camera and microphone. However, in such cases, the Institute applies the practice of periodic roll call and checking the involvement of each student in the learning process. Speaking about the figures, it is important to note that out of 100% of full-time students, 85% attended classes in the traditional form of education in 2019, and in the distance format in the same year, attendance was 78%. While attendance in 2020 in the conditions of coronavirus in the traditional form was 54%, and in the remote form-95%. That is, as we have already noted above, distance learning was the reason that it became easier for students to attend the lesson, they were able to connect to classes without changing their location, without wasting extra time on the road. It is important to emphasize that these figures and conclusions are given regarding the study of students of the Moscow institute, which implies the availability of a comfortable workplace at home, as well as good technical conditions.

In the course of studying this issue, the following analysis criteria were identified:

- 1) availability of distance learning;
- 2) quality of educational material;
- 3) the academic performance of students;
- 4) professional development of teachers;
- 5) convenience of remote system.

According to these criteria, the impact of distance learning on the quality of education in higher education was determined, which is displayed in Figure 2.



**Fig. 2.** The impact of distance learning on the quality of education in higher education.

The positive impact of distance learning on the education system was noted by 65% of teachers, while 35% of colleagues noted the negative consequences associated primarily with the lack of control in exams and tests, as well as control works. Among students, a positive impact was noted by 75% of respondents, and 25% supported the negative impact of distance education.

Analyzing each criterion separately, it is important to note that the convenience of distance learning was considered from the point of view of the absence of additional time and financial costs for attending classes. The quality of the teaching material has increased, as the control over the teaching staff by parents who are close to students during classes has increased, as well as free control by the university management over the conduct of classes in a remote format. However, more than half of the teachers note a significant increase in the preparation time for classes, which, according to the authors, requires additional financial incentives in the form of bonuses to teachers. Student performance, as the study shows, has also increased. At the same time, it is important to note that 35% of teachers who note the negative impact of distance learning on the education system, cite as an argument that the student has the opportunity to write off the material on the exam or test, which in turn qualitatively worsens the level of education. As a counterargument, the students we interviewed say that each student should understand the degree of responsibility to himself for the quality of his education. According to the authors, this issue remains quite controversial from a philosophical point of view. Improving the qualifications of teaching staff was also noted in the study as to prepare for remote sessions used more materials and time, however remote format requires the technical training of teachers, which in turn broadens the mind and promotes the use and systematization of the newly acquired knowledge.

## Conclusions

The issues of the impact of distance learning on the education system in Russia, as participants of the Bologna Process during the COVID-19 pandemic, have a high level of

scientific and practical significance, since they allow optimizing the regulatory mechanisms in the education system, its improvement and development.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that the transition of the higher education system of the Russian Federation, as a participant of the Bologna Process, to a distance learning format, has both positive and negative consequences. The negative consequences, first of all, should be attributed to the lack of technical equipment of participants in the educational process, especially in the regions of Russia.

However, the study conducted by the authors using student questionnaires allowed us to conclude that Russia coped with the tasks set for the Ministry of Education and Science and the transition was not so painful for both students and teachers. To a greater extent, the reason is the close interaction of higher education and society, especially when countries face such serious challenges as the coronavirus epidemic. In the context of a pandemic, self-organization of both students and teaching staff is important to achieve the highest results.

It is important to continue working in this direction, to improve the experience of the countries participating in the Bologna Process, in particular Russia, in improving the practices of teaching and learning in a distance format. Of course, the remote study format is more acceptable for the higher education sector, in comparison with the school level of education, since students are already more responsibly and consciously involved in the educational process. However, there is a positive experience among younger children, even preschool age. Significant importance in this issue is given to the qualification of the teaching staff. In this regard, it is important to improve the quality of educational materials and take a branching approach in the chosen profession.

Humanity must understand that it is necessary to adapt to the new conditions of life in all spheres, including in the field of higher education.

## References

1. Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" of December 29, 2012 N 273-FZ (as amended on December 8, 2020).
2. Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation dated 23.08.2017 No. 816 "On approval of the procedure for the use of organizations carrying out educational activities, environmental training services."
3. Bataev A.V. Analysis of the world market for distance education // *Young scientist*. 20. 205 (2015)
4. Minnaev E. R. Distance education in Russia: real conditions and development problems. *Higher education in Russia*. **11**. (2008).
5. Prokofieva T.Yu. Formation and development of distance learning in the world, *Problems of local self-government*, **5 (29)**. (2008) [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://www.samoupravlenie.ru/29-09.php/>
6. Rodionov DG, Kushneva OA, Terentyeva NA International authority of the Russian higher school: problems and solutions. *Innovacii*. **9 (179)**. 81 (2013)
7. Khakimova L., Lapasova F. The role of distance learning in the higher education system during quarantine measures in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic // *InterConf.*, 2020.
8. Tsirenova M.I. Experience of using massive open online courses in distance learning for Chinese students during the Covid-19 epidemic // *Modernhumanitiessuccess / Advances in the Humanities*, 31 (2020)
9. Distance learning at school closures: how well prepared are students and schools? Information from PISA // Saytorg ([https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127\\_127063iiwm328658&title=Learning-remotely-when-schools-close](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127_127063iiwm328658&title=Learning-remotely-when-schools-close)) (accessed 12/19/2020)
10. De Wit H., Deka L., Hunter F. (2015) Internationalization of higher education – what

can research add to the policy debate? In: Curaj A., Matei L., Pricopie R., Salmi J., Scott P. (eds) European Higher Education Area. Springer, Cham, available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_1) (date of access 12.02.2019).