Challenges of Applying Distance Technology to the Study of History (based on the results of a sociological survey of students in Togliatti)

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Abstract. The article discusses the problems of distance learning. They are relevant due to the increase in the demand for continuing education, the development of teaching methods for humanities, particularly history. Distance learning in history is related to the task of shaping historical thinking. The purpose of the article is to study the attitude of university lecturers and students towards distance learning in history classes. The empirical basis of the article was the results of a sociological survey conducted among the students of Togliatti State University in 2021 (N=287).The analysis of the survey results shows that the students' views on distance learning in history are divided. About half of the students are positive about this mode of study, and the other half are negative. There were more respondents among young males, as well as technical students, who described the history distance learning sessions positively. The students are attracted by the extensive use of Internet sources and visual materials. Among girls, as well as humanities students, there are more of those who have a negative attitude towards distance learning in history. The negative aspects are related to technical problems, as well as the lack of direct communication with the teacher. The respondents who do not have a high level of interest in studying history are more likely to express a positive attitude towards distance learning. In contrast, the respondents who are interested in history are more likely to have a negative attitude towards this form of training.

1 Introduction

Researchers distinguish several stages in the development of distance education. The initial stages of distance learning focused on the educational needs of the lower strata of society. The modern stage of distance education is based on the extensive use of information technology providing an opportunity to create a system of continuing education. The use of mobile technology allows learning to take place in environments that were previously not regarded as learning spaces. Data mining and new technology opportunities create the conditions for individualised learning. These developments can be applied in combination with traditional learning technologies as well as independently from them. The current stage

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in the development of distance education is a turning point. There is no clear assessment of new approaches effectiveness when compared to previous educational technologies [1].

The results of international studies on the effectiveness of distance learning conducted during the pandemic show that this learning mode poses a number of complex problems. The data received indicate a significant decrease in the quality of education. This is particularly reflected in the increasing number of students who fail [2].

The widespread use of distance learning in modern society is driven by the challenges of lifelong learning. The solution of this problem is closely related to the development of skills to search for and apply information independently. The spread of distance learning in various countries has prompted the creation of the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) technical standards, serving as a guide for the learning process organisation.

The purpose of this article is to analyse theoretical and empirical material on students' and lecturers' attitudes towards distance learning in history classes.

2 Literature review and methodology

According to experts, history learning using distance technology should be based on the principles of accessibility, adaptability, efficiency, reusability, as well as durability. This implies extensive use of information resources provided by libraries, archives and museums. Effective learning is not possible without communication between students and lecturers via videoconferencing [3].

Foreign scholars consider the formation of historical thinking to be an important aim of history education. Historical knowledge should develop students' skills for both critical examination of historical sources and interpretation of their content. Historical thinking is necessary in order to form ideas about the past based on a critical assessment of historiographical materials. This capacity makes it possible to rely on scientific methodology when evaluating information about the past. History in this sense appears to be a matter of critical verification of historical information, considering the specific nature of historical study [4].

Historical science, when interpreting any events, admits the existence of many positions. This fact can give rise to mutually incompatible interpretations and different ways of explaining the reasons. The pluralism of approaches to the assessment of events creates difficulties in the teaching and learning of history. These difficulties relate to students' lack of skills in critical analysis of historical sources.

Students do not realise that the study of history involves the interpretation of "facts". This interpretation involves not only the creators of historical texts, but also those who read them. Students are not able to critically evaluate sources of historical information or the actions of people in the past if they do not have their own viewpoints on the matter [5]. Thus, the task of forming students' skills in analyzing historical sources and understanding the features of the historical context is relevant.

Some researchers focus on the change in the nature of communication between the subjects of the learning process during distance learning. The problem of creating incentives for learning is becoming a major challenge for educators who are concerned about the quality problems in education [6].

The university lecturers believe that an important element of distance learning is the organisation of students' independent work. Information technology makes it possible to use cartographic material and archive materials available in the public domain. Interest in learning history is fostered by multimedia materials and interactive teaching methods [7].

Researchers point out the advantages of distance technologies for organising various patriotic activities that aim to shape the civic identity among the younger generation. Such activities include, in particular: lectures, discussions, conferences, business games, etc. [8].

Researchers also note training shortcomings for history teachers as one of the current problems in history teaching. Many lecturers are not able to use the Internet effectively to teach history [9].

According to the researchers, the attitude of students to the introduction of distance learning in history is ambiguous [10]. The effective study of history requires the skills of systematising information and critical thinking. These skills are insufficiently developed among modern youth. Distance learning in history opens up a wide range of possibilities for using the Internet sources. However, this model of self-education does not generate deep and long-lasting knowledge.

The use of distance learning technologies in teaching full-time students in the context of a pandemic creates a number of complex problems. These problems include students' low motivation to learn, reflected in the fact that half of the students show a cognitive decline by the second week, and only 5% show an increase in their cognitive activity [11].

One of the problems of distance learning is clip thinking of students in everyday communication. The researchers propose to take into account the advantages and disadvantages of clip thinking when organizing distance learning. The solution to this problem may be found in an optimal combination of clip thinking and analytical thinking [12].

The researchers point out that visualisation techniques used when teaching history should focus on active learning of the material. The techniques make it possible not only to use illustrative material, but also to develop critical thinking and skills of working with maps, tables and archival materials [13].

Modern methods of teaching history include pedagogical developments aimed at using video clips. They are used to provide students with an understanding of the historical context, to provide material for analysis when carrying out tasks and to consolidate the material covered [14].

3 Research design

In order to obtain the information on the attitude of young people towards historical knowledge, a survey of Togliatti State University students was conducted in October 2021.

The object of the study is the respondents of two groups of specialities (technical and humanities) between the ages of 17 and 25. A total of 287 people were interviewed. This sample allows the results to be estimated at 95% confidence level with a sampling error of 5%. Girls make up 39% of respondents and boys represent 61%. Technical students are represented by 48% of respondents and humanities students - by 52%. Among technical students, 88% are male and 12% are female. There is an inverse ratio among the students of humanities. Males make up 38%, and females - 62%.

4 Research results

The survey participants were asked the question: "Are you interested in the history of Russia?" A third of respondents (33%) answered in the affirmative. 53% of respondents chose the answer option "interested in some topics". 14% of respondents are not interested in history. Students in the humanities were 9% more likely to be interested in history, with 42% of those surveyed choosing this option. Representatives of technical specialties are 5% more likely to say that they are not interested in the history of Russia.

The male and female students who took part in the questionnaire were asked: "What positive aspects, in your opinion, are there in learning history using distance technology?"

68% of respondents noted the use of Internet sources as a positive aspect. 66% of the respondents see advantages in the use of Internet technology because it allows extensive use of visual materials. Girls note this answer option 7% more often than the average for the array.

A convenient learning mode was reported in 53% of the questionnaires. The opportunity to communicate directly with the teacher was mentioned by 28% of the respondents.

26% of respondents believe that distance learning takes less time to prepare for classes. This response option was mentioned by boys 5% more often than the average for the array.

The answer option "simple tasks" was noted by 12% of the survey participants. The option "other" was marked in 3% of the questionnaires. 3% of the survey participants find it difficult to answer this question.

Let us consider the characteristics of students' perception of distance technology advantages in learning history depending on their interest in the subject (Table 1).

Table 1. Positive aspects of learning history using distance technologies depending on the interest in the subject (in % by columns).

Positive aspects of distance learning	Array Data	Interested in some topics	Not interested in history	Interested in history
extensive use of visual materials (presentations, films, etc.)	66	73	57	74
less time is spent on preparation	26	25	30	13
extensive use of Internet sources	68	80	59	52
the possibility of direct communication with the lecturer	28	32	25	22
convenient learning mode	53	48	55	52

The students who are interested in history are 12% more likely to mention the use of online sources as an advantage of distance learning. Extensive use of visual materials was reported to be 7% more frequent.

The students who are interested in some historical topics highlight these benefits 9% less frequently. The remaining positions are marked at the level of the average for the array.

The students who are not interested in history are more likely than others to indicate the use of visual sources among the advantages of distance learning. The representatives of this group are half as likely as other students to mention less time spent while preparing for classes. They are also 13% less likely to highlight opportunities to use Internet sources.

In the questionnaire, the participants expressed their views on the negative aspects of learning history using distance technologies.

Technical problems and equipment deficiencies were noted in 68% of the questionnaires. Young females marked this answer option 9% more often than the average for the array. For young males this issue is less important, being mentioned in 62% of the questionnaires.

Humanities students in 76% of the questionnaires mark technical problems and lack of equipment. 51% of humanities students consider the lack of direct communication with lecturers during the classes to be a disadvantage. This result is 8% higher than the array data.

Depending on students' interest in the study of history, their opinions differ regarding the negative aspects of distance technologies used in the study of this subject (Table 2).

Table 2. Negative aspects of studying history using distance technologies depending on interest in the subject (in % by columns).

Negative aspects of distance learning	Array Data	Interested in some topics	Not interested in history	Interested in history
technical problems, equipment deficiencies	68	66	71	61
increased amount of self-study	34	23	32	52
lack of direct communication between lecturers and students	43	59	41	22
weak incentives for in-depth learning	32	34	29	26
large volume of complex tests	20	25	20	26

The students, who are interested in history, more often point out the lack of direct communication between lecturers and students as one of the disadvantages of distance learning. This response option is highlighted 16% more often than for the array, and a high volume of complex tests is marked 5% more often. The respondents in this group were 11% less likely to say that distance learning in history requires more time for independent work. The remaining response options are marked at the level of the average for the array.

The students with a selective interest in history report the disadvantages of the distance form of history study, their result is at an average array level.

The students not interested in history are 18% more likely than others to report an increase in the amount of independent work as a disadvantage of distance learning. Of these, more respondents (by 6%) were unhappy with the large volume of complex texts. The representatives of this group are 21% less likely to highlight the lack of direct communication with teachers in distance learning.

The remaining answer options are marked by students who are not interested in history(by 6% -7% less than in the array).

The survey participants were asked to give an overall assessment of their attitude to distance learning in history at the university.

31% of respondents have a positive attitude towards it. This opinion is 6% less likely to be shared by girls (25%). 24% of respondents express their attitude in a more reserved way – "rather positively". Thus, 55% of those surveyed described their attitudes towards distance learning as positive.

The rating "rather negative" is presented in 19% of the questionnaires. Girls give it 9% more often than the average for the array. 12% of respondents have a negative attitude towards the distance learning of history. Thus, the number of students who have a negative or rather negative attitude to distance learning is 30%. 14% of respondents find it difficult to answer the question.

Table 3 shows the relationship between students' attitudes towards distance learning in history and their interest in the subject. Among the students who show interest in history, there are 14% fewer respondents who are positive about the distance form of studying the subject. Correspondingly, this group has 16% more of those who are negative about distance learning in history.

Table 3. The attitude of students to the distance form of studying history, depending on their interest in this subject (in % by columns).

Attitude to distance learning	Array Data	Interested in some topics	Not interested in history	Interested in history
positively, rather positively	55	41	63	56
negative, rather negative	32	48	23	23
find it difficult to answer	13	11	14	21

The students who are selective about studying history are 8% more likely to express their positive attitude to distance learning in questionnaires. Among the students who are not interested in history, there are 8% more of those who find it difficult to express their attitude to the distance form of studying history.

The representatives of technical specialties in 68% of the questionnaires note a positive or rather positive attitude to the remote study of history at the university. This result is 13% higher than the array average. Humanities students, on the contrary, are 8% less likely to express a positive attitude towards distance learning (47%).

Among the humanities students, 41% of respondents have a negative or rather negative attitude towards studying history in a distance learning format. This result is 10% higher than the average for the array. Correspondingly, there are 11% fewer technical students who are not satisfied with the distance learning format for history.

5 Conclusions

The results of the study show that the students are ambivalent about the use of distance technology to study history. The attitude to distance technologies depends on gender differences and specialization of training. There were more respondents among young males and technical students who were positive about the use of distance learning technologies in history studies. Young females, as well as those in the humanities, are more likely to have a negative attitude towards distance learning technology.

Students' attitudes towards distance technology are differentiated according to their interest in learning history. The students who are interested in history are more likely to have a negative attitude towards distance learning in this subject. This result can be attributed to technical problems, as well as to the lack of effective communication with the lecturer during the classes. The students who do not express a particular interest in history, on the contrary, are more likely to emphasise the positive aspects of distance technology. Thus, the use of distance learning technologies in history classes brings to the forefront the problem of student motivation in learning the subject.

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