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E-LEARNING IN THE PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY – STATUS AND PERSPECTIVES (RESULTS OF AN EXPERIMENT)

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Abstract: *The paper shows the results based on the positive experience in e-learning in higher education in the world and the results of my research made in the last 10 years. Made by me an experiment with e-courses loaded in created educational components of an integrated information system, called Plovdiv e-University.*

Key words: *personalized e-courses in system Moodle, success rates of students, e-learning in High education, quality of e-learning*

1. Introduction

The dynamic development of modern technologies contributes to the emergence of new organizational structures in the field of education. Along with conventional forms of learning have emerged and new so-called open forms of education and training groups of words conventional and open learning are used to denote two different approaches to the organization, conduct and management training.

Learning is a complex process driven by the needs of the development of society. Therefore it should not be considered static and isolated from the development of other aspects of public life. By necessity arise issues of continuous improvement system of training to improve scientific training and skills of teachers in management of teaching and not least, construction students on appropriate learning style and work that will contribute to the development of their independence to more effectively solve the tasks to strengthen even more the process of self-mastery them.

Training materials for distance learning, as opposed to traditional developed a new methodology using various media (print, online, audio and video materials, radio and television), allowing students to train on them. Information can be located in both three-dimensional and in four-dimensional space with sound and animation.

For these reasons, the author of remote teaching materials is a major key figure in the process of organization of distance learning, and his choice is crucial for the successful (or not) to conduct the training.

The problem for the style of the teacher and the student is paramount. And it must be developed with great seriousness because this style theoretically and practically viable means to accurately manage the learning process. Solving these problems is done by looking for interesting and varied forms of expression of educational content.

The school of the future is invariably associated with the use of modern information technology. It is expected that the presence of computers in schools will offer new opportunities to improve the quality, content and teaching methods. Today computerized information technology and enter into the learning process. They provide excellent opportunities for training and dissemination of materials for independent work, qualification, closer communication between teacher and student, and open up new horizons for distance learning.

Distance learning in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is a foreseeable reality and the conditions of the Bulgarian educational system in the part of higher education and postgraduate training. The severe economic situation and the increase in the proportion of paid forms of education and training make it relevant and preferred to forms of regular and part-time. The most serious advantages of this training are related to lower its economic value and the ability of the

adult learner to operate freely with time spent on learning and other types of activities implemented 1.

2. E-learning in the Plovdiv University

In The Higher Education Act define what forms of education exist in higher education in Bulgaria: regular, part-time, evening and distance. Indicating that distance education is carried out only by higher education institutions, accredited and established in the terms and conditions set by this law. National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation approve criteria for assessment and accreditation in accordance with this Act and with state educational requirements 8.

In secondary legislation (Ordinance on state requirements for the organization of distance learning in higher education institutions, adopted by Council of Ministers Decree № 292/02.11.2004, and the promulgated in the State Gazette number 99/9.11.2004) settled state requirements for the organization of distance learning in higher education institutions of the Republic of Bulgaria. A definition is: Distance learning is an organization of educational process in which the student and teacher are separated by location, but not necessarily in time, created distance is compensated by technological means 4, 9.

Distance learning is equal to full-time training on the content of the curriculum, number of credits required for the degree, diploma for a degree and professional qualification. Precipitation rate is that learning materials and resources for self-employed in distance learning in a specific specialty, provide not less than 75% of the educational content of the curriculum and develop a methodology that matches the specifics of the course.

In this Ordinance 9 under Article 6 states that:

Subsection (1) the planning, organization and implementation of distance learning is done through specially designed service unit of the university - Distance Learning Center.

Subsection (2) Distance Learning Center carries out technological and technical provision of training.

Subsection (3) Training and methodological support in remote form is carried out from the main unit, hold appropriate training.

Plovdiv University "Paisij Hilendarski" has created and applies the following practical implementations 2:

● Regional Center for Distance Learning at the University of Plovdiv was founded in 1996 by draft program PHARE. The project was developed at the Department "Computer Science" at the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics. The project is the first computer-equipped training room and the first multimedia laboratory for the development of teaching materials. Delivered are communication and computer equipment for distance learning, specialized software tools for video and TV presentations and more. Delivered is specialized literature on distance learning. Built a video about 50-60 seats, school computer room and office 7.

The Regional Center for Distance Learning with activity development Distance learning in Bulgaria, development and implementation of distance learning courses and programs at different levels, design and creation of methods and means of introducing new information and communication technologies in education and others.

● The environment for conducting Distance learning in Plovdiv University " Paisij Hilendarski" there is a positive assessment by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation (letter with reference number 271/15.02.2016), based on which university can organize and conduct distance training for all educational degrees after accreditation of relevant specialties 11.

● Results achieved so far are published as in hundreds of scientific papers and presented at conferences in Bulgaria and abroad, as in dozens of dissertation developments in the field of e-learning and distance learning 7.

● Training in distance learning may include attendance periods when it corresponds to the specifics of the course and the needs of the students. Presence periods take place in the main units of the Plovdiv University; they may not exceed 30% of the audience employment provided for full-time training in a given subject in the curriculum.

● Inspection and assessment of students' knowledge is carried out in accordance with the forms of testing provided for in the curricula as the main form of examination is written examination, incl. conducted by means of ICT. Examinations are held in the training period (current exams) and during regular and resist sessions (final exams) provided in control and transparency of the examination procedures 3.

● To help the students be issued Guide to access educational materials and resources for distance learning. It contains information to relevant educational material, including Internet-based (textbooks, supplies, tests, software training programs, video and audio cassettes) 5.

● Plovdiv University is in the process of accreditation of two graduate programs:
  − E-learning;
  − Teacher engineering disciplines.

Master's program "E-learning" prepares highly qualified specialists in the field of new educational technologies. Suitable for teachers in higher and secondary education and for professionals in the public, private and non-governmental organizations and companies engaged in the management, administration, training and retraining of personnel, development of human potential and more.

Master's program affects three main aspects of e-learning – pedagogical, software-technological and organizational management. It offers a thorough examination of issues related to:

- planning, organizing and conducting e-learning;
- assessing the quality of e-learning;
- designing and developing e-learning materials and courses;
- learning content management;
- evaluation in e-learning;
- financial planning and management of e-learning.

The training is oriented to training of specialists who possess specialized skills in at least one of the three aspects of e-learning and broad fundamental training in the other two aspects. The basic training is conducted through mandatory courses and specialized - through selection of appropriate elective courses.

Master's program "Teacher of engineering disciplines" provides pedagogical training of specialists-engineers, allowing them to work as teachers in the specialty they have completed. Planned for the study are the main educational disciplines, according to Council of Ministers Decree № 162/1997 promulgated in the State Gazette, issue 34/25.04.1997, whereby students to acquire the necessary pedagogical skills, allowing them to conduct both research and teaching 10.

3. Research methodology

This paper presents a survey of opinions of students from the University of Plovdiv, Branch-Smolyan, in second course on e-learning course "Pedagogy" and their availability to participate in this type of training 6.

The lecture course on "School Pedagogy" provides basic knowledge on the following topics: the emergence and development of school education, theory of education, theory of education and theory training.

This study makes it possible to identify the main trends in the attitudes of young people towards this new and somewhat unknown form of education and the expectations they have for her and possible obstacles, which they would do this kind of training ineffective.

The study involved 40 students in second course of the "Information Technology, Mathematics and Educational Management", "Bulgarian language and English language" and "Bulgarian language and history with cultural management". Of these students: 33 are female and 7 are male. Average age of students is 23 years (22.73).

Students participated in a mixed course on the discipline "Pedagogy", including both traditional classes (lectures and exercises) and electronic activities (publication of lectures and plans exercises in a virtual learning environment, conducting electronic discussions publication developed by student's products: reports and presentations in electronic learning environment). Based on their experiences as students in traditional learning environment and at the same time as participants in e-learning environment within the reviewed course, they had to discuss their attitude towards e-learning and its different elements and whether they integrated these technologies in the future work as teachers and lecturers.

After two months of participation in the mixed course students had created a special forum. I have created several common themes and let the students the opportunity to not only meet the already published my subjects, but they themselves create their subtopics within the given already common themes. As an incentive for participation it was announced that the first five of the most active in electronic forums, students will receive one unit to the final evaluation and the latter five – 50 hundredths. Each week the teaching team of course did a ranking of the current top ten students, assessing not all posted, but only those that you add something new to the discussion and made sense. The remaining posts were deleted in order not to create unnecessary "information noise" in the electronic discussion. This proved to be an effective way to increase student motivation for participation in the electronic discussion.

4. Results

Assigned to survey my common themes were: "Advantages of e-learning", "Disadvantages of e-learning" and "Traditional learning or e-learning?".

As an "Advantages of e-learning" students identified:

First the students raised the possibility each of them to learn from your home computer without the need to be present in the classroom as in the academic schedule, i.e. without often absent from work or if you do not live in Smolyan – not to have to travel.

Secondly students perceived as more cost-effective availability of lectures in a virtual learning environment, rather than the traditional purchase of textbooks or making copies of materials given by the teacher. And approved facility in attitude dictated during lectures texts. Students say they prefer to find these lectures dialed correctly and shaped typographic than rely on notes that are often fragmentary and inaccurate. Furthermore, the training materials are also available from any computer at any time of day.

Important for students is the fact that traditional training seminars are limited in time and in them is not possible to hear the views of all students. In e-learning, each student has the opportunity to read the published opinions of their colleagues to seek information from various sources and publish its opinion.

It is not insignificant and that the students and enhance their computer literacy and consequently increases their self-esteem of people who are "in line" with the new information technologies.

As a "Disadvantages of e-learning" students identified:

First students put that e-learning can easily be transmitted theoretical knowledge but can't acquire practical skills.

Secondly students indicate one still existing economic problem, namely: training required hardware and software resources that are not available to everyone.

Good sign for future educators that have noticed the fact – requires more self-discipline on the part of students participating in e-learning than students participating in traditional training.

Students answered my question "Traditional learning or e-learning?" as follows: 24% voted for traditional training, 72% of students voted for e-learning, and 4% of students respond "I can't determine". This led me to conclude that young people are accustomed to the computer since childhood and handling it freely, are a priori supporters of e-learning and prefer it to traditional. You can also say that the model you prefer the students: use the electronic form of training for theoretical subjects of the curriculum and the release of more time in this way for practical classes, workshops and internships, which currently are not strongly represented in the study plan. So 90% of students would prefer a mixed form of education.

5. Conclusion

With e-learning, we as teachers can:

- to "unload" the curriculum of theoretical modules and separate practice proper workload;
- expand opportunities for group work;
- to invite for lecture courses professors from different universities and experts from business;
- authors of learning materials become more affordable communication;
- to give students the right to seek information from any source and continuously communicate with the labor market and to follow its requirements.

The logic in the development of the educational process should directly lead to maximizing self-reliance and self-initiative of adolescents in view of their age features and capabilities. Mastered the system of scientific knowledge, armed with solid skills and habits, they will be able to solve increasingly complex educational and production tasks.

Students through the learning process should be trained rationality and this self-educating to think rationally.

Knowing the regularities of the learning process of its relative cost as cognitive, contradictory and dynamic process allows the teacher who most closely uses creativity of young people to steer, submit it deep scientific content, reality and performance.

These facts would make higher education more competitive and attractive for students.

Of course, the realization of this type of training is associated as with administrative obstacles as and with teacher's will to change.

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