MODERN MODEL OF DISTANCE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS OF CREATIVE SPECIALTIES

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Abstract: The current complicated epidemiological situation around the world has placed its stringent demands upon the educational process in terms of effective use of distance formats of learning, and, moreover, the ubiquitous application of such formats, even with regard to those subjects which had never been expected to use solely distance learning (physical education, foreign language, creative cycle disciplines, etc.). A pedagogical experiment was held within this research in order to find out the opinions of students regarding the quality of educational process based on the developed model. It has been demonstrated that the model of distance learning proposed by the paper authors contributes to personalization of educational process and improves its adjustability to the needs of consumers of educational services.

Keywords: online learning, digital technologies, creative specialties, educational resources, students, academic and teaching staff.

1 Introduction

Presently when distance learning is entering the mainstream at all levels, the leading trend in the development of education around the world is the use of online technologies in learning. Due to the ubiquitous use of distance technologies at all levels of education in the context of modernity, the need has arisen to develop aids for online learning to ensure adequate selection of digital learning resources and the success of education. Research of the market of electronic learning content becomes necessary due to the expanding digital education platforms, which make it possible to tailor the content for a particular learner out of the huge volume of available courses.

In accordance with the purpose of the study and the realities of the modern distance environment the need to improve the quality of education becomes apparent, where a significant tool is online learning, which development is driven by internal (formation of a digital society, development of digital, information and communication technologies, changing demands of employers to the competences of specialists) and external (establishment of a digital school in the Russian Federation, changes in the needs, requirements and expectations of students and teachers with regard to the educational process, emerging trends for the development of non-cognitive competencies) factors. Currently, the Russian Federation is intensely searching for the most effective and adequate options to integrate digital technologies in education and help trained specialists to successfully adapt to the modern high-tech market in their professional field (Malushko & Lizunkov, 2020).

In addition, the study attempted to show the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in comparison with the traditional forms of education, thus systematizing the opportunities and problems of using innovative forms of learning in the educational process, as well as providing practical recommendations for development and creation of electronic learning content. This research illuminates the works reflecting the study of online education formats not only from the perspective of pedagogical science, but also economics and culture (Sizova et al., 2018a; Sizova et al., 2018b).

2 Literature Review

According to N.Sh. Kozlova (2019), currently absolutely all industries are undergoing digital transformation. Education and science are no exception, despite their inherent heaviness and even rigidity (Strielkowski & Chigisheva, 2019).

Thus, A.I. Fomina (2016) points to the urgency of problems associated with the use of online learning by higher education institutions, and observance of the requirements laid down in the Federal Law On Education in the Russian Federation of December 29, 2012 (2012), the Federal State Standards of Higher Education 3++ (2018).

In research practice, in the field of culture and arts noteworthy are the studies of I.M. Krasilnikov (2019), who highlights the benefits of using digital technology at higher education institutions, as well as the need to embrace pedagogical potential of digital technologies, in particular, in the arts education.

The high importance of creating a system of vocational training for academic and teaching staff (ATS) in the Russian Federation is determined by such factors as:

- Rapid development of the global market of educational services in the information and communication environment (Medvedeva et al., 2018);
- Russia entering the global educational space with the task of making a proper presentation of the competitive higher education institutions of the country;
- Growing role of digital technologies and information and communication infrastructure in the educational activities of the Russian higher school, leading to modification of general education programs along with the introduction of innovative learning tools (Starodubtsev & Isaeva, 2017).

Socio-economic changes are also a trigger for the innovative forms of educational process (Medvedeva et al., 2019). The teacher's readiness to make a greater use of information technologies and online services is a mandatory professional requirement; it is a modern digital competence, which is characterized by the teacher's ability to implement professional pedagogical activities in the modern digital learning space (Gruzdeva et al., 2020).

The use of information technologies in work with students of different ages relies on the ability of a music teacher to employ multimedia capabilities of the computer, thereby boosting learning motivation and facilitating absorption of new information by students. The modern approaches to organizing professional training of a specialist aim to develop creative potential of a graduate capable to solve professional tasks (Sizova et al., 2018a; Sizova et al., 2018b).

3 Research Methodological Framework

The main purpose of this research was to analyze the current context for the implementation of distance learning and to develop recommendations for improving the effectiveness of distance forms of learning in vocational training when creating electronic educational products.

For achieving this purpose, the following objectives were addressed:

- Analyze and systematize existing studies relating to incorporation and use of remote technologies in the learning process;
- Identify current trends in the development of distance learning in the face of present-day challenges, including the imposed quarantine measures;
- Develop a model of studies for the students of creative specialties based on the distance learning technologies;

- Assess quality of the educational process incorporating the developed model from the perspective of students and academic and teaching staff.

We employed analysis, synthesis, generalization, method of pedagogical modeling and pedagogical experiment as theoretical and empirical research methods.

4 Results and Discussion

For all pedagogical teams across all educational institutions, of all levels and types (universities, schools, vocational training and supplementary education facilities), the main goal as regards distance learning is to maintain the proper quality of learning. In extreme conditions when direct contact with learners has become impossible, by taking a creative approach to solving non-standard professional tasks, teachers sought and found various ways and techniques to organize online studies and develop distance-learning assignments (Sizova & Okuneva, 2020).

This paper presents our experience of organizing distance learning at the creative department of Minin's University, the Department of Music Production and Music Education. After realizing that the distance format in education is there for a long while, the management of the department identified the following most urgent problems:

1. Insufficient level of digital competencies of academic and teaching staff;
2. Difficulties in organizing studies on creative disciplines of certain specifics (vocal class, choral class, musical instrument practice, camerawork, directing class, etc.) with the use of distance learning technologies;
3. Deficit of online materials for vocational training in certain creative disciplines.

The identified problems required immediate solution. So, an effective solution was developed for each of them.

The very first step for ensuring the smooth educational process was to organize professional communication between the teachers of the department. In the difficult conditions of organizing distance learning, the teachers had to deal with a severe deficit of communication among colleagues. If we compare the ordinary mode of learning and the learning process during lockdown, the teachers lost the possibility of professional communication in the space of learning, extracurricular activities and interdisciplinary design. This type of direct communication is indispensable from the professional activities implemented within the walls of the university, and is essential for addressing the professional needs of discussing emerging problems, finding possible solutions to the learning tasks, sharing own achievements and achievements of peers and students (Samerkhanova & Balakin, 2020). Having identified the deficit of such professional interactions between teachers in the mode of distance learning, we proposed to create a dedicated online platform (online teacher's room) for professional communication within the department, for self-education and development, where teachers could discuss urgent problems meeting online twice a week or as often as needed and continue their scientific collaboration.

For this purpose, to improve the digital competencies of staff the teachers received a proposal to split into mini groups (of 2-3 persons) based on common professional and scientific interests and, importantly, such groups were to include teachers of different age categories, so that they could help each other with technical issues or content of studies on the training schedule.

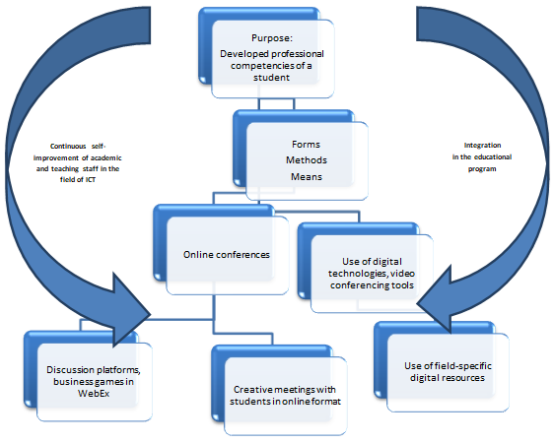
The Department of Music Production and Music Education at Minin's University delivers specific creative disciplines in professional field, which require face-to-face learning, direct demonstrations of professional acts, and running operational control over the reproduced actions. However, modern level of technology and the ubiquitous digitalization gives us the opportunity to teach music and screen arts remotely. While analyzing the experience of using the distance education formats for teaching creative disciplines, we revealed the deficit of methodological electronic materials for the creative disciplines (vocal class, choral class, camerawork, directing, etc.). Despite e-learning courses developed for all disciplines taught at the department, including creative disciplines, their content was insufficient to implement training only remotely, without direct contact. Teachers revisited the content of disciplines taking a new look, applying creative pedagogical approach, and created not just comfortable, but adequate conditions for development of students under new conditions.

In the distance learning, the central unit of training is an online lesson, which we view as mandatory and necessary for effective and efficient learning, for creative communication between a teacher and a learner. There are many Internet platforms and cloud services (Zoom, pruff.me, skype, discord and others) enabling such online communication, which allow the teacher to choose the method most appropriate to the learning objectives. In addition, after analyzing the content of creative disciplines and studying the experience of colleagues implementing distance learning, special assignments for students' self-directed learning were prepared. Students could present their results of completed assignments on various electronic platforms (Moodle, MOOC, various social media, messengers, e-mail, etc.).

In order to gain a theoretical understanding of the effectiveness of classes based on distance technologies, we used the method of pedagogical modeling, which helped us to develop a model of classes for students of creative specialties under the distance learning program as presented in Figure 1.

In addition, an important element of training is the system for collecting data, other relevant information and students' feedback. Here the Google services proved to be helpful: Google Forms and Google Tables. Settings of Google Forms allow a student, after completing the test, to immediately see which questions were answered correctly, and where the mistakes were made. The teacher has a detailed analysis readily available: he/she may see which tasks caused difficulties, which wrong answers were most often, the results of each student (Samerkhanova & Balakin, 2020).

Figure 1 Model of Classes for Students of Creative Specialties under a Distance Learning Program



Source: author`s own processing

Thus, despite the specific content of creative disciplines, we managed to ensure the continuity of the learning process without detriment to its quality. In the situation of compulsory and ubiquitous application of distance learning, we identified new educational benefits of this format, which allowed us not only to continue vocational training of our students without interruption, but also to facilitate their professional and creative growth.

It should be noted that the creative development and personal and professional self-fulfillment of our students was fueled by their participation in remote creative competitions for performers

and theorists organized on various online platforms and digital resources. This was made possible by the great saving of students' time, which they spent on preparation for competitions instead of traveling, and they got an opportunity to make performances at the all-Russian level (Sizova et al., 2020).

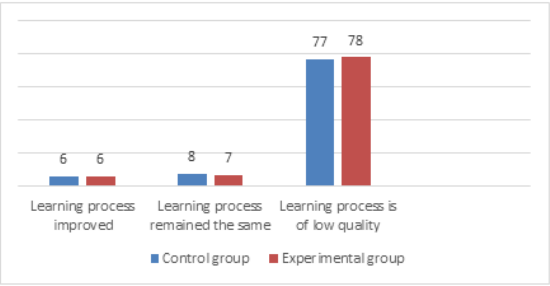
The benefits of distance learning ensure the continuity of the learning process. It is no secret that students may miss classes due to the lack of time, health issues, etc., the teacher may be on a research trip, but with the distance support of the learning process, we may create the conditions for sustainable uninterrupted learning.

At the end of May 2020, WCIOM (Results of the WCIOM Survey, 2020) conducted a survey intended to find out how students assess the quality of education in a distance learning format. According to the collected feedback, more than half of the students assessed the level of teaching in the distance format as high or rather high (53%).

Within the scope of professional activities of the department, we conducted a pedagogical experiment. As part of the experiment, we selected two groups: experimental and control. In the experimental group we implemented the model developed by us, while in the control group the educational process was implemented without the use of a set of assignments based on distance learning technologies. The experiment that was held in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021 included 154 respondents. They were the students of Minin's University pursuing studies in the field of training 44.03.01 Pedagogical Education, specialty Music, as well as students majoring in 55.05.04 Production, specialty Producer of Television and Radio Programs. The students of the abovementioned specialties and fields of training are the future graduates in the sphere of culture and arts. The pedagogical experiment as its tool used the method of questionnaire survey of students, as well as academic and teaching staff who were delivering these training programs in the number of 28 people. The total number of respondents was 182 people. Both the control and experimental groups each included 91 respondents. The purpose of this survey was to identify the opinion of students and teaching and academic staff on the use of a distance learning format for implementing the developed model of training (Figure 1). The questions in the questionnaire reflected three major opinions: the quality of the educational process improved (Agree/Disagree), the quality of the educational process remained the same as before (Agree/Disagree), and the content and quality of the educational process significantly deteriorated (Agree/Disagree).

The pedagogical experiment consisted of three stages: data collection, formative and control. At the data collection and control stages we conducted a survey, at the formative stage the model of distance learning developed by the authors of this paper was implemented. The results of the questionnaire surveys are presented in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Figure 2 Results of the Questionnaire Survey at the Data Collection Stage of the Experiment after Introduction of Distance Learning



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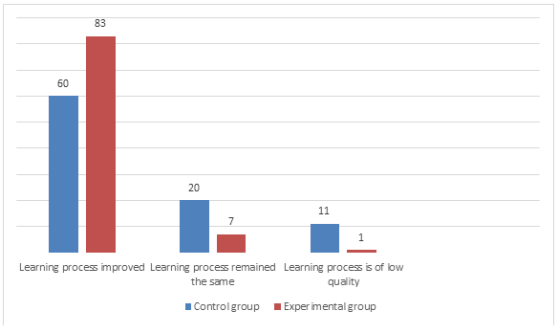
At the data collection stage of the pedagogical experiment, most respondents pointed to the inadequacy of the learning content in the educational process based on distance technologies. Results are shown in Figure 2.

At the forming stage of the experiment, we used the developed model (Fig. 1) to train students in the experimental group. Teachers delivering training on the disciplines and implementing modules in the experimental group were provided with methodological aids, which they used in the training process.

Figure 3 Results of the Questionnaire Survey at the Control Stage of the Experiment



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The results obtained at the control stage of our experiment indicate a clear positive dynamics in the opinions of students and academic and teaching staff of the experimental group regarding the quality of the distance learning with the use of the model developed by us. Thus, 83 respondents see improvements in the quality of education, 7 people see no changes and 1 person has an opinion that the quality of the educational process is low.

5 Conclusion

The forced shift to remote learning led to many issues associated not only with the technological support of the learning process. It is apparent that in the current context of limited direct face-to-face contacts, the questions of technical support, software and service support become highly important and urgent. However, the methodological problems of delivering the content of courses in a digital format also require close attention. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the specificity of disciplines' content when converting the existing educational content into e-learning format with the adequate use of educational electronic resources, special services for collecting feedback and Internet technologies for building pedagogical communication. The teaching of creative disciplines also involved the use of field-specific digital resources for music composition and performance.

The experiment results allow us to feel confident about such obvious benefits of distance learning as time saving and accessibility, enabling each student to build the learning process in a way corresponding to their individual capabilities. However, we should also note that the lack of direct interaction between student and teacher and among students is a substantial drawback of the distance learning. Still, we believe that the use of distance learning aids for any educational program, including creative specialties, is highly effective for maintaining full contact with students and is the key to success of the educational process.

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