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UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF COVID-19-INDUCED EDUCATION PROCESS

ВОСПРИЯТИЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОГО ПРОЦЕССА В УСЛОВИЯХ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19: ОПЫТ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЕЙ ВУЗОВ

The article presents findings of a survey conducted among foreign language teachers of Belarusian universities regarding their work during the COVID-19 period. The examination of the distance teaching experience has been made in terms of three aspects: emotional, language teaching, and logistical. Teachers' opinions on the prospects of distance learning of foreign languages implementation have been obtained.

Представлены результаты опроса преподавателей иностранных языков университетов Республики Беларусь относительно их опыта преподавания в условиях пандемии COVID-19. Опыт дистанционного преподавания изучен в трех аспектах: эмоциональном, методическом и материально-техническом. Также получены мнения о перспективах внедрения дистанционного обучения в образовательный процесс по иностранным языкам.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world experienced life-changing transformations in diverse spheres. The disease outbreak forced humankind to reconsider the ways we conduct business, legislate, enforce rules, provide health care, and educate.

A significant number of studies have been undertaken to reveal how educators around the globe grappled with the challenges posed by the pandemic: how education stakeholders reacted and responded when COVID-19 broke out, and in its wake — how they reflected on its implications and the lessons it taught the education sphere in particular and the world in general [1–4].

The goal of our research was to examine perceptions of Belarusian University foreign language teachers of their COVID-19-induced remote teaching conditions in relation to three aspects: emotional, language teaching, and logistical. A questionnaire was designed, which comprises open-ended questions, to discover teachers' opinions about the digital remote teaching process, the way they felt at its inception and some time later; whether this way of working fostered teachers' cooperation and whether their perception of the process of education underwent any changes. The questions were also aimed at eliciting information on the relationships with colleagues, the way the lessons were transformed regarding techniques and methods of teaching, new skills

obtained by teachers, as well as technical support of the remote teaching process. In addition, the questionnaire assisted us in asking teachers for their recommendations on how to improve the education process in remote working conditions.

The research findings uncover some peculiarities of the emotional aspect worthy of attention. Despite uncertainties caused by COVID-19, 57,9 % of respondents were interested in digital remote teaching. Although 57,9 % felt anxious, there were 10,5 % teachers happy to try the new approach to teaching foreign languages. In the initial period of teaching remotely 43,2 % continued to take a keen interest and 73 % claimed that they felt calm. It is crucial to notice that 0 % chose the feeling of fear. However, 72,9 % of respondents wanted to return to the classroom working conditions and enumerated reasons, such as a desire for direct communication, absence of technical issues, greater efficiency of teaching students in the classroom, and benefits of interaction in the framework of learning a foreign language. Among the reasons for unwillingness to return to offline education teachers listed a fear of COVID-19, burnout, and time wasted on commute. 13,1 % associated returning to classroom education with the feelings of concern and fear. Quite many teachers noted that during the remote working process the level of mutual help increased, which manifested itself in assisting with language teaching matters and offering technical and emotional support.

The language teaching aspect findings of the study demonstrate teachers' willingness to get accustomed to the new working conditions and ability to reflect on them. Regardless of the uncertainties and a limited time span to adapt to the new conditions of teaching, 50 % of respondents found new directions for their professional development that they are ready to explore. Nevertheless, 34,3 % claimed that digital remote learning did not help them to organise their working time more efficiently. In spite of this fact, 47,4 % observed that now they have an incentive to develop their skills in the field of online teaching. Belarusian university instructors appreciated the possibility to use various interactive tools for teaching, the flexibility of the online education process, and the availability of tools for online tests creation to monitor students' performance. Instructors were inspired to a significant degree by online teaching, notwithstanding some issues associated with remote classrooms, for example lack of enthusiasm and participation on students' part, their audio-only presence during online lessons, and sometimes inability to teach lessons with a focus on developing foreign language interaction in pairs and/or groups.

As far as the logistical aspect is concerned, the research findings show that education stakeholders still have a long way to go. 28 % of teachers were dissatisfied with the provision of logistical and technical support; while 10,5 % were provided with all

necessary technical help. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, quite a large number of respondents (76,3 %) worked in Zoom, 60,5 % in Moodle, 18,4 % in Skype, and 10,5 % in Google Classroom. Platforms such as Discord, Microsoft Teams, Padlet and Webex were also used. A lot of teachers had to work from their homes availing themselves of the Internet connection that was sometimes unsatisfactory and resulted in lesson disruptions, use their own hardware and software, and learn to teach online either on their own or from more experienced colleagues.

When asked what transformations in online education they deem necessary, instructors put forward the following proposals: devising training courses in order for teachers to gain a deeper knowledge of digital systems; organising teacher collaboration events with a view to fostering professional interaction with colleagues; creating electronic textbooks and a single database of shareable sources; and providing regular technical support.

Finally, teachers were asked to choose the most convenient work mode. As a result, 73 % of respondents chose a blended format (combination of online and offline teaching), 18,9 % expressed a preference for exclusively in-classroom education, and 5,4 % are in favour of online education only. Also, some teachers would prefer to work offline on conditions of a flexible schedule.

Having examined the three aspects of University teachers' remote work during the pandemic, we should admit that instructors managed to handle the challenges they encountered by being independent and fast learners; to provide emotional, teaching methods, and technical support to one another in times of need; and later, to reflect openly on the experience they had gained and display initiative in sharing their recommendations on the improvement of the education process.

Resources

1. The Impact of COVID-19 on Education Systems in the Commonwealth / Commonwealth Secretariat ; ed.: A. Osman, J. Keevy. — London : The Commonwealth, 2021. — 265 p.
2. The Impact of COVID-19 on School Education and the Road to Recovery [Electronic resource]. — Mode of access: <https://home.kpmg/in/en/home/insights/2021/10/nep-covid-19-school-education-assessments.html>. — Date of access: 01.10.2022.
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4. *Godber, K. A.* COVID-19 Impacts on Teaching and Learning: A Collaborative Autoethnography by Two Higher Education Lecturers / K. A. Godber, D. R. Atkins // *Frontiers in Education*. — 2021. — Vol. 6. — P. 1–14.