

## **Systemic Challenges of Digital Foreign Languages Education in Global Emergency Meta-Context (The Pandemic and Warzone Perspectives)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The worldwide pandemic and, subsequently, the active warzone in Eastern Europe (Ukraine) has posed a variety of difficulties for construction, procedure and methodology of higher education that impacted the extent of personal experience, results and quality of university education worldwide.

The COVID-19 pandemic induced amplified digitalization measures in the higher education sphere, informed by the need to take quick comprehensive action in order to achieve the overarching result to transform educational scenarios into interdisciplinary digital, blended, and hybrid frameworks.

The objective of the study was to assess the dynamic changes in the effectiveness of digital education for Foreign Languages programs in Ukraine, in the pandemic and wartime emergency timespan (2021 to 2023). The comparative survey benchmarking of various dimensions of digital learning is implemented to evaluate the progress individual quality and efficiency of transforming traditional Foreign Languages Acquisition process into online remote and hybrid format, facilitated by digital technologies.

**Keywords:** Systemic Challenge, Digitization, Dynamics, Foreign Languages Education (FLE), Wartime Digitization

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The worldwide pandemic and, subsequently, the active warzone in Eastern Europe (Ukraine) has posed a variety of difficulties for construction, procedure and methodology of higher education that impacted the extent of personal experience, results and quality of university education worldwide [1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

The COVID-19 pandemic induced amplified digitalization measures in the higher education sphere, informed by the need to take quick comprehensive action in order to achieve the overarching result to transform educational scenarios into interdisciplinary digital, blended, and hybrid frameworks [6, 7].

Taking into account the context of the erupted military intervention on Ukraine in February 2022, and the ensuing information warfare in various digital ambients (social media, news coverage, digital communications), the specific value of the learning outcomes and outputs is allocated to the digitally enhanced foreign languages education as a tool of the internationally broadcast strife of Ukraine for freedom and sovereignty.

The consequent functional tasks to meet this challenge in the educational sphere are estimated as 1) adapt the existent educational scenarios to digital, remote and hybrid formats; 2) to upgrade ICT competence and digital literacy of all participants of the educational process under extreme duress; 3) to activate

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complex interdisciplinary (soft and hard) skillsets, otherwise latent or underutilized in the educational process.

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## **2. STUDY DESIGN**

The digital and hybrid learning activities in Foreign Language Education were qualitatively profiled in order to design an online survey to evaluate individual experiences in emergency digitization paradigm for university students of Oriental and European Languages programs.

The study mission scope permits to disclose the following tracks of findings:

Modelling of various digital distant learning formats (u-learning, m-learning, hybrid learning) and modes for university-level Foreign languages programs and projected digital literacy requirements for different groups of stakeholders;

Comparative analysis of in-depth assessment of individual digital and hybrid learning experiences and by different groups of stakeholders in European and Oriental Languages university level programs in regions of Ukraine according to such dimensions:

Dimension A: individual perception of e-learning and hybrid learning quality of foreign languages acquisition programs by different groups of stakeholders according to the role in educational process, previous experiences and foreign language proficiency;

Dimension B: variation in e-learning and hybrid learning quality assessment on foreign languages programs in different regions of Ukraine due to educational factors (core competences, soft skills proficiency; learning design);

Dimension C: variation in e-learning and hybrid learning quality assessment on foreign languages programs in different regions of Ukraine due to social and psychological factors (information fatigue, stress, community influence);

Dimension D: variation in e-learning and hybrid learning quality assessment on foreign languages programs in different regions of Ukraine due to technological factors (digital literacy, digital divide, digital gap);

Institutional recommendations for customization of digital and hybrid learning models and procedures, tailored to the individual and group needs of stakeholders in Foreign Language Acquisition on university level beyond the continuous emergency measures.

The inquiry design incorporates the following consecutive steps: digital and hybrid learning activity, experience and application profiling;

The online survey method applied to conduct in-depth assessment of individual digital distance and blended learning experiences and practices by relevant groups of stakeholders (students, faculty and administrative staff) in Oriental and European Languages university level programs in regions of Ukraine;

digital content analysis of individual associations with different modes of learning by relevant groups of stakeholders in Oriental and European Languages university level programs in regions of Ukraine (via corpus and text-mining tools);

digital and hybrid learning models and procedures adaptation and customization, tailored to the individual and group needs of stakeholders in Foreign Language Acquisition on university level.

Three consecutive online surveys of over 700 teachers and students of European and Asian Languages provide for assessment of progressive dynamics of efficiency of digitized foreign languages education, assessment of changes in quality evaluation of digital and hybrid education in the timespan of the pandemic measures through the years 2021-2022 and wartime digitization measures of 2022-2023; assessment of changes in quality evaluation of digital and hybrid through the pandemic as compared to regular, in-presence and wartime emergency foreign languages learning modes; quality evaluation of education design, dynamic development of learning results and acquired competences for university-level Foreign Languages programs in the timespan of 2021-2022 quarantine limitations and 2022-2023 wartime challenges.

The survey was launched for the first time in January 2021 to evaluate the quality of emergency digitization experiences of students in 2020 (the first academic year of the quarantine measures). The non-comparative results are published separately [5]. The survey was then repeated in November 2021, to evaluate the quality of ongoing digitization experiences of Foreign Languages students and to estimate positive or negative dynamics in e-learning quality assessment in 2021 (the second academic year of the quarantine measures). The survey was again repeated in December 2022, to evaluate the quality of emergency digitization experiences of Foreign Languages students in the active warzone to estimate positive and negative dynamics in e-learning quality assessment (the first academic year of the wartime measures in Ukraine).

The online questionnaire for both benchmarking iterations was identical and comprised of 21 questions total, divided into such dimensions:

- 1) Questions that disclose the generic evaluation of individual experiences of digital education for Foreign Languages Programs in the global lockdown measures and active warzone measures;
- 2) Questions that disclose the comparison of individual experiences and quality of individual experiences of digital emergency education and traditional, in-presence education in Foreign Languages Programs;
- 3) Questions that disclose the individual quality assessment of the emergency induced digital education design and workflow, education results and skills, developed in HEI programs of Foreign languages.

## **3. FINDINGS**

In technological and professional teaching as well as education methods, difficulties containing insufficient distant teaching and structural disadvantages, have appeared in the crisis. Disruptions in workplaces complicated apprenticeship projects as well as, the main constituents of a market-responsive technical and vocational system.

In higher education, online instruction has been provided through different recorded assignments and distance platforms. On the other hand, this form of learning and teaching has been postponed by a number of institutions of higher education, owing to the lack of instructions concerning technological communications. Moreover, there are problems with how to adjust terms and educational schedules, as some sets of courses can be successfully realized in distant forms and some cannot [9, 10, 11, 12].

Qualitative assessment of the e-learning and hybrid learning was conducted through the retrospective evaluation of respondents' individual experience through the span of emergency digitization measures, in order identify and select the preferred features and elements of e-learning and hybrid learning among the following:

- 1) Ability to work from home (ability to study/teach in evacuation);
- 2) Ability to customize of the study space (video conferencing or LMS);
- 3) Adaptability and flexibility of the work schedule;
- 4) Save time for commute (save time to a bomb shelter);
- 5) Parallel performance of several tasks and activities;
- 6) Opportunity to technologically diversify educational activity, educational materials and methods;
- 7) Ability to adapt the structure and content of curricula of disciplines to the conditions of online learning;
- 8) Ability to activate and improve different types of soft skills;
- 9) Opportunity to improve digital literacy;
- 10) Ability to work independently in the learning process;
- 11) No need for constant interpersonal communication;
- 12) Ability to engage international professionals through digital means.

Evaluation of respondents' individual experience through the span of emergency digitization measures, in order identify and select the features and elements of e-learning and hybrid learning, considered drawbacks, challenges or a hindrance among the following:

- 1) Forced need to work at home (uncomfortable living conditions, the need to use a bomb shelter, displacement); 2
- 2) Impossibility / difficulty of adaptation and flexibility of the work schedule;
- 3) The need for specialized technical means of training and online communication / technical limitations;
- 4) Lack of interpersonal communication with students and colleagues on a regular basis;
- 5) Emotional burnout;
- 6) The need to activate and improve different types of soft skills;
- 7) The need to improve digital literacy;
- 8) Increasing the amount of workload in preparation for training sessions and ensuring the learning process;
- 9) The need to adapt the structure and content of curricula of disciplines in terms of online learning;
- 10) The need to organize and control the independent work of students;
- 11) Availability of mechanisms for control and accounting of the educational process.

Respondents of all groups were prompted to identify the key challenges [16] that impaired effective and qualitative adaptation of learning process design into hybrid and digital distant format. The following types of impediments were derived from the individual experiences of Oriental and European languages programs stakeholders in the timeframe of COVID-19 in regional universities of Ukraine:

*Social and psychological* – Emotional burnout; Stress; Fatigue; Health; Domestic difficulties / limitations; Time restrictions in connection with the introduction of quarantine restrictions;

*Technical challenges and digital literacy*: Technical difficulties (lack of stable Internet connection, lack of necessary equipment, capacity of household computer equipment, blackouts due to active warfare); Lack of digital literacy skills; Lack of experience in transforming the curriculum and training materials into an online format; Lack of digital communication experience; Lack of experience with electronic learning management systems

(Moodle, GoogleClass, etc.); Lack of experience with auxiliary ICT tools for organizing the learning process (video conferencing, testing, surveys, online boards, etc.);

*Soft skills*: Lack of skills of adaptation and self-organization; Lack of situational learning and training skills; Lack of communication and cooperation skills.

Problems with learners' apprehension or despair may be recognized by regular viewing of the school or university residents. At elementary school pupils' viewing relates to tutors and pupils. They fill in short opinion polls regarding pupils' feelings and activities. In case of middle and high school viewing contains learners' opinion polls devoted to the regularity or sternness of any emotional and expressive issues [3].

Psychologists can help students who are very touchy and sensitive. The final aim is to assist the most favourable progress of every teenager. Tutors are able to notice and identify all transformations in students' temper, behaviour, and training [14, 15].

It turns out to be very important to make use of own abilities and developed anti-strain techniques, as well as the help of other people. One may gradually diminish nervous tension, and hence properly deal with anxiety. It is necessary to identify what observations and state of affairs generate anxiety. This may give a reply to what approach have to be accepted for anti-strain actions and deeds which permit evading or adjusting to the tense environment.

The evasion policy intends to eliminate the tension motivation by removing it. In order to be influenced by nervous tension, a person must avoid too much traumatic information (e.g. news programs on TV, radio, or the Internet doom-scrolling). The emergency state requires not to be talked about constantly. Persons who sustain or generate tension must be avoided as well. One must examine which tense circumstances have the rank of "obligation" and which are "favors". Those which are not required to be visited can be cut off.

The method of reformulation is an evasive means used when a source of stress cannot be escaped, although there is an opportunity to reorganize it. One is able to create a suitable program for this time. Due to the fact that, in the current condition, relatives live together in the same location for a long period of time, this fact possibly will create a lot of quarrels and conflicts. All of them may be avoided if plans of obligations for the family members, a set of laws for using tools required for learning or work are set up.

The method of adjustment and recognition [13] is applied when the elimination of the tension motivation cannot happen. In the situation of the present pandemic, this is a plan that must be considered nowadays in the future. We have to search for encouraging features in this condition and think about what's taking place in our livelihood owing to remoteness (perhaps it is a moment when relations with other people may be developed; it is a suitable occasion when we are able to manage with affairs that were overlooked earlier or abandoned, etc.). There may perhaps be a lot of thoughts for constructing today's life and finding optimistic and hopeful aspects in it. Moreover, the method of adjustment and recognition may answer the actual questions about distant education and how by means of different schemes and systems to reduce nervousness and anxiety.

The study limitations stem from the content and range of the iterative survey results. The potential of further studies encompasses evaluation of quality and efficiency assessment dynamics of digital education in regions of Ukraine; comparative case studies of different types of Foreign languages programs and different regional programs transformation due to emergency digitization in the framework of the pandemic and warfare

measures; sustainable modes of Foreign languages programs digital adaptation in countries of the world beyond the timespan of the pandemic restrictions.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The worldwide pandemic and ensuing emergency digitization have influenced profoundly the design and workflow of higher education. That caused fundamental shifts in the range of experiences, learning results and quality assessment of Foreign languages education in Ukraine.

The qualitative evaluation of digital and hybrid education through the iterative benchmarking of the students' experiences was conducive for identification of the comprehensive, functional scale of the comparative dimensions of positive and negative dynamics of digital education quality assessment.

Through the time period of 2020 to 2021 digital and hybrid education in Foreign languages programs has been progressively evaluated as increasing from mostly to fully comparative in quality to traditional in-presence learning in the pre-pandemic timespan.

The evaluation of digital education design, leaning outcomes and acquired skills in Foreign Languages programs in the timeframe of the pandemic helped disclose the dynamics in socio-psychological challenges that prevent efficient transformation of learning process into online and hybrid mode for all groups of respondents that were consistently surveyed.

The overall positive dynamics of the evaluation of identified challenges of efficient digital educational adaptation is informed by the arrangement of factors: 1) consistently improved level of digitalization of the teaching resources and implementation of a functional e-learning environment in the form of a digital campus; 2) consistently improved and adapted digital competence level through various types of training and activities; 3) consistent professional psychological, communicative, technological and organized peer support to ensure the alleviation of challenges and impeding factors of foreign languages programs adaptation to digital and hybrid format. These elements of educational procedure and management at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University can be scaled to serve as best practices and recommendations to ensure sustainable quality of transformation of Foreign Languages programs into digital, blended and hybrid formats in the capital city universities as well as regional universities of Eastern Europe.

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