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ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *The article reveals the aspects of distance education, since education involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and plays a key role in shaping a person's life and career as a continuous and integral process throughout life. In today's society, the importance of distance education often faces misconceptions. It is important to explore these issues and highlight the transformative impact of distance education on professional development, promoting a comprehensive understanding of its role beyond traditional academic frameworks. Provided the use of world experience, a combination of progressive technologies of distance education, it can have many prospects in the professional development of students of higher education.*

The research uses the method of theoretical generalization from scientific research, comparative analysis and statistical data. Accordingly, it has been investigated how distance learning contributes to professional development, allowing students of higher education to realize their potential and make a significant contribution to the development of society. Theoretical scientific approaches to the use of distance learning in the professional development of higher education students are described and analyzed.

Keywords: *distance education, professional development, students of higher education.*

Introduction.

Education, as a continuous and integral process throughout life, involves acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and plays a key role in shaping an individual's life and career. Distance learning contributes to professional development, enabling higher education seekers to realize their potential and make a significant contribution to the development of society. The current situation in our country today, namely the state of war declared on February 24, 2022, which continues to this day, necessitates the reorientation of modern education and the redistribution of its development vectors towards distance learning to ensure the safety of education seekers' lives.

In modern society, the importance of distance education often encounters misconceptions. It is crucial to study these issues and emphasize the transformative impact of distance education on professional development, fostering a comprehensive understanding of its role beyond traditional academic frameworks.

The aim of this research is to study the impact of distance education on the professional development of higher education seekers.

Main text.

A review of the scientific-theoretical and methodical literature of the specified problem revealed the works of many scientists who consider the problems of distance learning organization [1–3]. Foreign scientific researchers note that availability of information sources, individualization of learning, a convenient counseling system, democratic relations between the tutor and the student, a convenient schedule and place of work, etc. become important in distance learning [4, 5].



Some researchers believe that distance learning is a systematically organized educational process that should carry out ongoing joint autonomous learning, in which students are in the center of attention [6].

Scientists determine that distance learning can be carried out in several modes, which differ in the goals and tasks of training, the features of presentation of information materials, which can take place in synchronous mode and asynchronous modes [7].

Problems of computerization of education and development of software and methods of using software products in the training of future specialists are devoted to the work of such scientists: V. Bykov [8], M. Zhaldak [9], L. Kartashova [10], O. Spirin [11] etc.

There is an opinion that distance education was first utilized in the United Kingdom in 1836 [12]. This approach was characterized by a one-sided connection between the student, the instructor, the educational institution, and the learning materials. Full-fledged distance education became possible in 1858 at the University of London. During this time, candidates from around the world, regardless of where and how they acquired their education, were allowed to take exams for obtaining academic degrees of bachelor's and master's in all fields, except for medicine.

Due to the popularity of distance learning, the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) was established in 1987. Currently, it consists of 22 members from 20 countries. The majority of its members are open universities and national associations, whose primary function is to provide distance education to target groups using distance learning methods. There are also university associations where the majority of students attend in-person classes, but the option for distance learning is available.

In Ukraine, the transformation of the distance learning system has been influenced by the achievements of educational science in other countries. Therefore, it is logical that in the late 1990s, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) adopted the law "On the National Informatization Program", which brought positive changes in utilizing the Internet in education and other aspects related to the implementation of distance learning [13]. In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine approved the "Concept of the Development of Distance Education in Ukraine", envisioning the possibility of expanding the consumer base and implementing a continuous education system "throughout life", as well as individualizing education in the context of widespread access to education.

The definition of "distance learning" is characterized by a variety of interpretations, indicating a wide range of approaches to understanding it. Therefore, let's focus on the idea that distance learning is one of the forms of education that emerged and evolved alongside the development of internet technologies. Today, it has clear characteristic features, principles, and specific methodological practices.

One of the newest forms of distance learning actively developing in global education is Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) – internet courses with extensive interactive participation and open access via the Internet [14]. The primary audience for such courses, hosted on specialized platforms, includes students with various levels of expertise, ranging from beginners to experienced professionals.



Platforms like Coursera, EdX, and Udacity aim to illustrate the concept of lifelong learning.

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning became one of the possible forms of education worldwide. Like everywhere else, in Ukraine, urgent measures had to be taken to prevent threats to the health and lives of people. Given the suddenness of the situation, educators and educational institutions' management were unprepared for this transition and had to quickly build up distance learning systems. Despite the challenges, distance education managed to keep the learning process going worldwide. In the Roadmap of the UN Secretary-General on digital cooperation, published in June 2020, the crucial role those digital technologies play in education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is emphasized. The digital divide between those who have internet access and those who do not threatens to become a new face of inequality, exacerbating social and economic problems. Unequal access of learners to education due to a lack or shortage of computer equipment, poor internet connectivity, psychological differences in information perception among learners at different levels, and other factors influenced the level of knowledge of learners who studied during the quarantine.

The imposition of martial law in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, has made in-person education for learners impossible, making distance learning the only available form in the education system. The challenges of contemporary society, particularly the state of war in Ukraine, have influenced the system of distance education. It becomes more in demand, with the relevance of issues related to organizing education for different age groups of learners, choosing internet platforms for organizing educational activities, and combining traditional teaching methods with those specific to distance education. Examining the issues of distance learning through the lens of historical retrospectives and spatial challenges allows us to observe not only its actualization as one of the promising directions in organizing scientific research but also its positioning as a sought-after solution for societal tasks.

The modern development of distance education can be viewed from the perspective of three key directions: 1) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); 2) distance learning within higher education institutions, either in addition to or in conjunction with traditional forms; 3) distance universities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States, the number of students engaged in distance learning is continually increasing. For example, in 2016, nearly a third of students in the U.S. were learning through this mode [15].

In Ukraine, there is no specific statistics on the number of individuals engaged in distance learning at higher education institutions (HEIs). However, based on certain indicators, it can be observed that distance education is actively developing, although it is less widespread than in leading Western countries. As of July 1, 2023, according to statistical data from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, among 375 HEIs: 1) 38 institutions (10.1 %) have fully transitioned to traditional face-to-face education; 2) 200 institutions (53.4 %) continue to operate in a distance learning mode; 3) 132 institutions (35.2 %) have chosen a mixed format for implementing the educational process; 4) 5 institutions (1.3 %) have not resumed their activities [16].



In 16 regions of the country, none of the higher education institutions (HEIs) has transitioned to traditional face-to-face education. This includes not only the front-line, near-front-line, and potentially dangerous/vulnerable regions (excluding the Odesa region) but also the HEIs in the Vinnytsia, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, and Chernivtsi regions. The highest rates of adopting this form of education among institutions of this type are observed in the Volyn (100 %), Rivne (50 %), Kirovohrad (45.5 %), and Poltava (33.3 %) regions.

The modern trends in the development of distance education are associated with convenience, commercialization, and an increasing number of opportunities for users. However, ongoing efforts are being made in improving the skills of instructors, developing organizational and methodological tools to ensure high-quality distance education, and establishing a transparent system for monitoring the learning outcomes of education seekers. The establishment of a regulatory framework is still in progress.

Conclusion.

Distance learning is rapidly gaining popularity in Ukraine and is currently in the early stages of development. However, leveraging global experience and combining progressive technologies in distance education could offer numerous prospects for the professional development of higher education seekers. Recognizing and harnessing the potential of distance education, we can collectively build a better future for everyone. One of the key tasks of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine remains the continuation of the digital transformation of the education and science sectors. The importance of developing this direction has been underscored by the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and is currently essential for improving education planning and management in the context of a full-scale war.

The dynamics of the development of distance learning in Ukraine depend, on one hand, on the ability of the higher education system to offer competitive professional knowledge and an effective mechanism for their transmission through information and communication technologies of distance learning. On the other hand, it depends on the individual readiness of higher education seekers to utilize the potentials of distance learning for acquiring professional knowledge. Additionally, it relies on the readiness of employers and society as a whole to recognize the equivalence of knowledge, skills, and competencies obtained through distance learning with those that can be formed within traditional forms of education.

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Анотація. У статті розкрито аспекти дистанційної освіти, так як освіта, як безперервний і невід'ємний процес протягом усього життя, передбачає засвоєння знань, навичок, цінностей та відіграє ключову роль у формуванні життя та кар'єри людини. У сучасному суспільстві важливість дистанційної освіти часто стикається з хибними



уявленнями. Важливо вивчати ці питання та підкреслювати перетворюючий вплив дистанційної освіти на професійний розвиток, сприяючи комплексному розумінню її ролі за межами традиційних академічних рамок. За умови використання світового досвіду, поєднання прогресивних технологій дистанційної освіти, вона може мати багато перспектив в професійному розвитку здобувачів вищої освіти.

У дослідженні використовується метод теоретичного узагальнення з наукових досліджень, порівняльного аналізу та статистичних даних. Відповідно досліджено, як дистанційне навчання сприяє професійному розвитку, дозволяючи здобувачам вищої освіти реалізувати свій потенціал і зробити значущий внесок у розвиток суспільства. Описано та проаналізовано теоретичні наукові підходи щодо використання дистанційного навчання в професійному розвитку здобувачів вищої освіти.

Ключові слова: дистанційна освіта, професійний розвиток, здобувачі вищої освіти.