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ANALYSIS OF TRANSITION TO A TOTALLY REMOTE CLASSROOM: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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The paper investigates the phenomenon of COVID-19 educational disruption through assessing teaching and learning processes in new realities, psychological challenges and methodological solutions. COVID-19 educational disruption is characterized as a drive to creating innovations in the area of digital teaching and learning processes, which would boost the efficiency of conventional face-to-face education further. First year students (N-350) undertaking English for Medical purposes course at the medical high school (General Medicine and Preventive Medicine Faculties) were surveyed to identify their psychological attitudes towards a totally remote classroom, that was implemented in the synchronous and asynchronous mode through ZOOM video-conferencing and LMS Moodle. Five groups of psychological problems reducing students' motivation, course satisfaction and learning performance were identified: academic issues; intrusion into privacy; peer issues; soft skills competence

problems; change of routine and rituals. These psychological issues challenge all the educational system and have to be taken into account while providing the pedagogic design for new online courses. The authors suggest creating an averaged Student Profile focused not only on the learning outcomes and academic performance, but involving such aspects as students' background, course satisfaction, motivation, digital awareness, etc. It requires a more thorough and pointed investigation of students' attitudes, drives, motives in conventional and digital learning environments. Such a widened Student Profile can drive pedagogic designers to efficient methodological solutions in the synchronous and asynchronous remote classroom.

COVID-19 EDUCATIONAL DISRUPTION; TOTALLY REMOTE CLASSROOM; SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING; ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING; COURSE SATISFACTION; STUDENTS' MOTIVATION; ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Introduction. Traditional pedagogic methods, trends and designs experienced unprecedented changes in 2020 due to COVID-19 educational disruption. Universities all around the world had to urgently turn to different types of online teaching and assessment. Although many higher educational institutions (HEIs) were not completely new to online pedagogic formats, totally remote classroom was and still is a challenge for academic staff [1], [2]. A very vivid metaphor for the transformation of educational processes 'We are building the plane we are flying' describes mixed feelings of HEI course designers during the 1 semester of 2020.

Defining the phenomenon "COVID-19 educational disruption", we would emphasize its temporary nature, since it took place in the educational world only once (from March 16, 2020 in Russia), but despite its negative connotation, it advanced pedagogic practices and encouraged innovations. While rebuilding courses and disciplines and adapting them to new realities of a totally remote classroom most universities applied two-approach methodology of synchronous and asynchronous learning [3], [4], [5]. Asynchronous learning is flexible in terms of time and place. Methodologically there are 4 basic activities to provide efficient asynchronous learning to students: watching videos, working with documents, organizing group work activities and performing practical individual activities. In most Russian HEIs teachers uploaded PowerPoint presentations, videos, tasks, created chats, forums on educational platforms that universities had used before COVID-19 educational disruption (LMS Moodle, etc.). Synchronous model of online classroom offered lectures and seminars that were usually organized in *Skype* or *Zoom*. Soft skills and IT-competence became crucial for synchronous learning for both, teachers and students [6].

Two-approach remote classroom methodology has become completely new educational environment and affected many factors important for training a professional, such as building hand-in skills, raising students' motivation, totally transforming assessment systems for students' knowledge, skills and competences [7]. Students found themselves in totally new and unprecedented positions, which caused anxiety, uncertainty, psychological problems for many of them.

This paper is practical in its nature, since it attempts to identify and classify various psychological challenges that students experienced during the shift to totally remote classroom. The aim of this paper is to investigate new teaching and learning space

and suggest instructions and methodologies to eliminate challenges.

The study was conducted in North-Western State I.I. Mechnikov Medical University (NWSMU), at the Department of Foreign Languages. We conducted two surveys (an open-question and a close-question ones) among 350 first year students of General Medicine and Preventive Medicine Faculties.

The surveys were targeted at 1) assessing the changes in course satisfaction with the shift to remote classrooms; 2) singling out the most difficult / uncomfortable / troubling aspects of remote classroom for students, 3) comparing the level of students' psychological comfort in studies before and after COVID-19 quarantine measures. Before describing the results of the survey a few words must be said on the specificity of the subject that students were interviewed about.

In the Russian Federation, medical university curriculum offers first year students a 96-hour course in English for Medical Purposes. The course presupposes a quite high command of English at the beginning (A2-B1), which some students, unfortunately, might find challenging and or even discouraging.

Other peculiar points about teaching English for Medical Purposes in a medical school are its preclinical character and a communicative nature, since its purpose is to foster communication competence at students in the medical sphere in English. Some communicative situations that students are engaged in while undertaking the course are completely new to them: doctor-patient role-plays, watching and discussing real-live medical videos, etc. At the 1st year of the medical high school, students are not experienced in the communication in medicine even in their native language. This fact sometimes causes distress at both students and teachers and in traditional face-to-face teaching and learning environment.

With the shift to remote classroom students inevitably were left with performing individual tasks while real-life or online communication (with peers or the teacher) became auxiliary. Zoom and Moodle classes organized for students cannot totally replace face-to-face communication. It is scientifically proven that due to longer and unnatural gaps between replies human brain finds Zoom-communication dissatisfying [8].

Another troublesome aspect for teaching English for Medical Purposes is the fact that some students perceive the subject as 'optional' since they enter medical school to study chemistry, anatomy, learn clinical skills etc., not English and communication [9].

The survey showed that the number of students who bear this idea in mind is falling very quickly (21% of them pointed at an index 'Life in the 21st century is impossible without English' as their main motive for taking the course), still there's a percentage of students (around 4%) who only perform the tasks to pass exam and continue university education.

All the above-mentioned specific aspects of teaching English for Medical Purposes are quite common for traditional a face-to-face classroom, and we have already learnt how to raise course satisfaction and students' motivation. At the same time with COVID-19 educational disruption we faced new challenges that are described below.

Methods. The conducted survey allowed us to single out 5 groups of psychological problems that were typical for first year students taking English for Medical Purposes course at NWSMU. They are: academic issues; intrusion into privacy; peer issues; soft skills competence problems; change of routine and rituals. We will look at them in a more detailed way.

Academic issues present two types of distress for the students. First of all, during

remote classroom learning it became obvious that building a hand-in skill of communication competence in medical area is hardly possible. Online tools, though effective as a supporting resource, do not allow to imitate real-life communication as traditional classrooms do. According to student-centered approach in traditional classroom methodologists have been working hard on changing the role of a teacher from overseeing to mentoring with giving more encouragement and freedom to students and coming to help as soon as they need it. In remote classroom this help is usually not immediate. Students get feedback to their work hours or even days after the completion of task (if we deal with LMS Moodle). As a result, they lose interest in what they are doing. Also, while having a seminar in Zoom, the teacher is unable to supervise all the discussions, role-plays, imitated dialogues etc. like in a real classroom. For a considerate time students might be left alone and feel insecure about what to do next and how successful they are.

Another serious drawback of a remote classroom which caused a great psychological distress among students is assessment of their learning performance. NWSMU, for example, worked out general rules for all the disciplines: students were writing a test which included 60 questions and was limited to 30 minutes in time. Even though various training tests were suggested, writing this final test was very stressful to students. They were anxious about the time limit, amount of the material, etc. From methodological point of view the final test as the only assessment option might not be the best choice since the communicative aspect of the discipline (which students were developing before the COVID-19 educational disruption, for 1,5 semesters) doesn't get to be assessed. In several EU countries and the US optional assessment practices were often suggested to students, e.g. to create a poster, to make YouTube videos or create a portfolio. Many students opted for these variants due to creative nature of these methods [10]. In our opinion, Russian HEIs should adapt these assessment practices to improve their efficiency and objectivity minimizing risks of students' dissatisfaction or distress.

Intrusion into students' privacy is a very sore point for students themselves and for their teachers. It deals with only synchronous model of teaching as asynchronous tasks didn't require online communication via Zoom or Skype.

Many teachers (rightly and habitually) required their students to have their cameras on while having a Zoom or Skype session. This caused a great deal of anxiety among students for many reasons. (i) Many students share rooms with their siblings and sometimes two or more synchronous remote lessons were happening in the same room at the same time. It hindered educational process greatly. Also, sometimes it was extremely uncomfortable for the teachers to 'peep' into students' private home lives. Sometimes they witnessed family scenes, inappropriately-dressed family members that were caught on camera, etc. Students felt deeply ashamed if this happened. (ii) Many students share gadgets with their siblings or parents. If a family owns only one desk PC, students often have to use smartphones for a synchronous class, which is uncomfortable and annoying for them. They lose concentration and don't get the full access to teaching materials sent by the teachers. (iii) Coming back to the comfort of their homes often meant for the students coming back to their usual responsibilities. E.g. as many kindergartens were closed many students had to combine learning and babysitting for their younger siblings. As a result, students got distracted easily, didn't follow the lesson plan, couldn't perform group tasks, etc. Psychologically they felt disadvantaged for combining two disparate

roles. (iv) Having entered universities many students left their hometowns, moved to dormitories and started feeling 'all grown-up'. The amount of parents' control dropped. When students returned home for a lockdown they had already forgotten that they have to report things to their parents. This unwanted parents' control became a very troublesome issue for many students. In the open survey many of them admitted to experience 'huge stress' because of their parents' control.

Peer issues. The survey showed that the transition to totally remote classroom slightly increased cases of cyberbullying among student peers: 14% of students admitted to having been cyberbullied before the quarantine, 18% said they were suffering from it during remote classroom education. With online tools used for training, students saw private lives, rooms, level of life of their peers, which stirred negativity and offence.

Surprisingly, the survey also showed a reverse trend. While some students experienced negative emotions from online interaction with peers, others experienced them from the lack of interaction. They said that they missed working in real teams, lost motivation without peer support that they used to get in the traditional classroom, etc. As it is well-known, universities are not only about studies, so peer issues and intensification of the psychological distress caused by the shift to remote classroom seriously affected students' peace of mind and, presumably, their learning performance.

The survey showed that 3 major points contributed to building soft skills competence and related issues. First of all, transition to totally remote classroom at NWSMU and many other RF HEIs meant that there is only one option for students – e-classes. Synchronous and asynchronous learning presupposes only computer-aided education, which may be uncomfortable or even impossible for some categories of students

(e.g. students with disadvantages). As the shift to totally remote classroom was happening drastically, teachers often didn't have time and opportunity to provide offline tasks for those students who preferred this type of training. In comparison, in the US students could send papers with performed tasks and get a paper feedback on request [11]. Working out methodology for offline remote education might be seen as the task for course instruction designers in RF for the coming academic term.

Another psychological issue connected with computer-mediated education is 'philosophical objections' to spending so much time in front of the computers [12], [13]. Most students that took part in our survey are 'Zoomers' – i.e. people born into Internet era. Their parents were always against them spending so much time in front of the screen. With the introduction of the remote classroom, nearly all aspects of life (education, entertainment, communication, etc.) went online, thus the time 'in front of the computer' got overwhelming for the 'Zoomers' themselves. Many (82%) admitted in the survey that they 'hated' their gadgets. With negative emotions so strong, it's very difficult for the teachers to expect high learning outcomes and performance from their students.

Change of routines and minor rituals, as the survey unveiled, has greatly affected students' psychological comfort. With the need to stay at home all the time students' physical activity dropped dramatically. They got less active, less determined to develop or even to move. Isolation from their peers led to decrease in motivation as it eliminated competitiveness. Many students admitted lacking time management skills to plan their day and assign enough time for all the asynchronous activities required. Living in a different time zone meant for many students the need to have a synchronous lesson late in the evening, or early in the morning, or even at

night, which was tiring. Students also admitted missing extracurricular activities: as it's been mentioned before, university is not only about studying; interacting, communicating, socializing in clubs and volunteering organization constitute a big part of being 'a student'. Students felt deprived of these activities.

Change of routine and minor rituals did not go unnoticed by the teachers, either. At one of the methodological webinars, organized online at the Department of Foreign Languages, NWSMU, teachers exchanged their experiences on unusual behavior that students demonstrated in the totally remote classroom. Students completely forgot about the dress-code; demonstrated serious behavioral disruption (e.g., having inappropriate background for Zoom sessions 'just for fun' or vaping during a synchronous class); didn't follow time etiquette (calling or texting teachers in messengers at any time). We tend to think that these situations are the result of the total change of academic routine and enforcement of a new and unwanted manner of training and communication with the teacher.

As we can see, totally remote classroom introduction caused psychological distress to students at many levels, which inevitably leads to the decrease in student academic performance, course satisfaction, motivation, etc. With ongoing fears of the second COVID-19 wave and continuation of working outside university settings, course instruction designers need to take into account these psychological challenges and methodologies to eliminate them.

Conclusions. According to the survey, the five groups of psychological problems that we described above are more or less universal. More than 78% of students pointed them out, so we can conclude that they might reappear regularly, for the next first year students who might find themselves in a totally remote learning regime as well.

In this regard, it might be useful to create a 'Student Profile' – an averaged model of a first year student. Before COVID-19 educational disruption Course Instruction designers at the Foreign Languages Department, NWSMU, created a Student Profile, but focused only on 1 aspect – academic performance. So, they checked the level of English in September, before the beginning of English for Medical Purposes course, followed students progress and got the idea of an average academic performance.

With totally remote classroom introduction we should consider widening our knowledge on Student Profile considering students' background, their digital skills, motivation, the level of course satisfaction, etc. Answering these and other questions we will get a better understanding of what course changes we need to introduce to make education more efficient.

Planning the online course should also change to enhance students' comfort. Practical lessons showed that replicating university day isn't productive and, for some students, doesn't work at all. EU and US course instructional designers admit that they had to 'scale back to just the essentials', meaning that they could not provide 100% training online and had to choose the minimum of the knowledge they wanted at the end of the course, and at the same time couldn't demand students to be as effective as in traditional classrooms [11]. Another important thing about planning is how we organize an online course for our students. Whereas the attempts to deliver 90-minute lectures online were not quite successful, giving 90-minutes seminars was a total failure [10].

EU and RF course instructional designers give the following recommendations for creating a course online: (i) break a long lecture into lump-videos of 5-6 minutes, each

focusing on a specific subject [14], (ii) divide time between synchronous and asynchronous learning as 50/50 [15], (iii) diversify methods of assessment. From our teaching experience we would add a very important category for reducing and minimizing the risks that disrupt learning process: combine passive and active asynchronous learning as 50/50% (watching videos and reading documents vs. doing interactive group activities and performing individual practical activities).

To sum up, we emphasize, that education in COVID-19 realities requires restructuring the conceptions and methodology of all courses. To make the course efficient and fruitful for both parties – students and teachers, course instructional designers need to consider students' psychological comfort.

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Воздвиженская А.В., Королева Н.Г., Липатова Е.Г. **Анализ практики перехода на дистанционное обучение: психологические и методологические аспекты.** В статье исследуется влияние пандемии COVID-19 на образовательный процесс в вузе с точки зрения новых реалий обучения, психологических вызовов, а также предлагаются решения методическим проблемам. Феномен негативного влияния на учебную деятельность, вызванного неподготовленным и неожиданным переходом на дистанционный формат, рассматривается с точки зрения перспектив цифровых методов обучения в контексте традиционного образования. Цифровые методы обучения, разработанные в период полностью дистанционной учебной деятельности должны в дальнейшем повысить эффективность всей системы образования, если будут учтены методические

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сбои, психологические проблемы и определены пути их минимизации. В исследовании приняли участие студенты первого курса медицинских специальностей (N-350), обучающиеся по дисциплине "Иностранный язык для медицинских целей". Авторы проанализировали психологическое восприятие студентами дисциплины, которая реализовывалась в условиях синхронной и асинхронной формы дистанционного обучения в СДО Moodle в комбинации с онлайн уроками в формате видеоконференцсвязи Zoom. Были определены пять групп психологических проблем, которые негативно повлияли на уровни мотивации студентов, их удовлетворенности курсом и результаты обучения: проблемы образовательной сферы, нарушение личного пространства, соперничество внутри социальной группы, коммуникация, цифровая компетенция, смена привычек и образа жизни. Данные факторы необходимо учитывать при планировании образовательного процесса с целью повышения его эффективности в дальнейшем. В основе на данное исследование возможно создать «усредненный профиль студента», который будет ориентировать цели, формы, методы и т. д. учебной деятельности вуза на минимизацию рисков личностного характера, а также параллельно формировать ряд актуальных на сегодняшний день компетенций – знание цифровых методов коммуникации и обучения, этики цифрового общения, толерантности к форс-мажорным ситуациям.

ДИСТАНЦИОННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ; СИНХРОННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ; АСИНХРОННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ; УДОВЛЕТВОРЕННОСТЬ КУРСОМ; МОТИВАЦИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ; АКАДЕМИЧЕСКАЯ УСПЕВАЕМОСТЬ