HIGHER EDUCATION DURING TRANSITION TO DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT--The purpose of our research was to study the reasons for the global popularization of mass online education, its ascension in terms of organizing education through the compelled transition to a distance format in all universities, and to build approximate forecasts of changes in higher education after the pandemic. It was interesting for us to analyse the process of complete replacement of the traditional educational format with distance learning, and how the teachers and students actively use online MOOC courses developed by other universities during the teaching sessions of universities. We also analyse how MOOC influenced the change in the traditional system of university education as well as how the dynamics of the number of students as learners has changed courses in online platforms. The leading research methods were theoretical analysis, review of scientific literature, information from internet resources, method of analysis of educational activities of higher educational institutions, and comparative analysis and interpretation of the results of the work. In the course of our study, we found that, in general, most higher education institutions were able to provide uninterrupted online education, and some of the teachers have improved or mastered their computer educational technologies for the first time. At the same time, problems have been identified that with all its wide functional capabilities, online learning is still inferior to offline learning: in terms of conducting laboratory work in engineering disciplines, organizing pedagogical practice for future teachers, research work, etc. Main difficulties for teachers are caused by: the inability to control students during the performance of credit work, to actualize Soft Skills, and incompatibility with online learning of academic disciplines rich in emotional, spiritual and moral views, feelings and beliefs. The practical significance of the article consists in the use of the obtained results and research materials in the organization and management of online and offline education in higher education institutions. The novelty of the study is that it analyses the situation of transition of the universities to distance education. Furthermore, it examines the problems of its implementation and the organization in terms of safety, physical and emotional isolation of students and teachers,

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as well as social inequalities in access to quality Internet connection and availability of modern computers. There is also a need for reformatting of the education system - optimal merging options for both online and offline formats of education.

*Keywords--online environment, distance education, MOOC, online course, university education, digital **competence**, offline education, university environment, Soft Skills, educational technology, international mobility, openness of education, integration of universities.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The large-scale development of online education (MOOC) was a global challenge that influenced the transformation of the higher education system. Firstly, ensuring the massiveness and accessibility of higher education, and increasing the number of students, regardless of age, occupation and social status. Secondly, evocation of increasing international competition among leading universities, and internationalization. In the history of education, massive open online courses appeared in 2006, which were the harbingers of a radical modernization of higher education. Statistical studies show how quickly the number of students who preferred online courses changed:

In 2017, approximately 800 universities developed 9400 courses for students. The number of students on Coursera increased to 30 million, and online courses to 2700 (Sun Dan, Jiang, 2015; Shah, 2017);

In 2018, Coursera began collaboration with 149 universities worldwide. The total number of students attending online courses reached 81 million (Dhawal, 2017).

MOOC have become proof that University education is not only based on academic traditions, but also has a phenomenal ability to generate new ideas, design breakthrough, product innovations and stimulate successful non-standard projects.

At the global level, the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic dramatically changed the scenario for the development of the higher education market: due to which, a compelled mass transition of higher educational institutions to distance learning took place. The initial reaction from many was a shock, and for others it was an opportunity to develop and implement new formats of work. In Russia, almost 80% of universities have switched to distance learning format without serious problems, 27 % of institutions have experienced difficulties, and 10% were unable to ensure uninterrupted Internet access to connect students due to the unavailability of infrastructure to such rapidly increased channel loads. A particular problem turned out to be the competence of teachers to teach online. There was a weak methodological development of disciplines for completing all the educational tasks in the virtual environment, such as individual technical disciplines, laboratory work, the organization of teaching practice, etc. According to Bay View Analytics, a US organization for the development, implementation, and analysis of global research, 70% of the 1.5 million teachers surveyed had no experience teaching in a virtual educational platform (Higher Education Reports, 2020). The majority of respondents (56%) reported that they used training methods that had never been used before. About half of the respondents (48%) reduced the amount of work they expected from students, while about a third (32%) lowered their expectations regarding the quality of students' work. As in Russia, many teachers experienced difficulties due to the incompatibility of the online environment with the academic discipline: "in wildlife monitoring, most of what we do involves field work with

animals ... and I'm trying to figure out how I'll replace this experimental component»; in art education, we cannot fail to meet in person" (Higher Education Reports, 2020)

II.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Today, as never before, we understand the importance of distance education and its capabilities in such crisis-ridden situation. Indeed, working in remote mode has turned into an effective, powerful substitute for offline tool - a training option. But, as we understand it, university education is inherently not only the transfer of new information and knowledge, but also the creation of them. Additionally, it is formation and development of an individual- an interactive process that is saturated with emotional, spiritual and moral views, feelings and beliefs (Oskolova, 2015). University education also comprise volitional efforts through live communication and interaction regardless of time, without dependence on the functionality of educational platforms. In the university environment, the student campus also offer a collective recreation, socialization, friendship, love, the exchange of experience, the formation of new connections, social networks, career opportunities, and a modern lifestyle that changes everyone. In an online environment, it is not possible to completely develop and actualize Soft Skills, which determines a person's success in life.

The distance learning format has turned the existing problems inside out, for example, officially there is a 5-point system for evaluation of students' knowledge, and formally - 100-point evaluation system, has long been subject to revision. Additionally, under the format of distance learning, the admission of exams, credit tests, and assessments requires new solutions - modern assessment technologies – to verify the students' identity. As shown by the data of the annual report "State of Technology in Education", among the 5 most popular technologies in the next 3 years, the second position is occupied by the tools for online assessment of learning outcomes of students - 31.4%. In the state of such pandemic, there's an ambiguous situation with the assessment of the results of students' educational activities: during self-isolation, everyone is located in different places, physically, socially, emotionally and in safety. And how objective will be the assessment of the educational activities of a student who is in such a situation, experiencing events beyond our control.

In the process of transition to a distance learning format, the social inequality of students became clearly noticeable. The social inequality includes the availability of modern technical equipment, computers, laptops, living in remote or rural places of residence - access to high-quality, reliable Internet connection. To maintain feedback with the teachers, students are trying to overcome technical problems through primitive (elementary) feature such as a telephone or through social networks: VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype, face-chat, etc. However, these features are only a temporary way out of the situation. Universities will be required to provide students with technical means and to increase attractiveness of such means to maintain their student population. There should also be provision of payment (simplification of the mechanism) for Internet access. And these inequalities in positions of students can cause a decrease in the quality of education, and difficulty in studying the modules of the discipline.

Studies that predicted the explosive effect of MOOC as a tsunami and that online learning will completely replace traditional offline learning will not materialize. In the period of such unprecedented situation, when

universities were forced to switch to online education, we were convinced that higher education will not be completely distant in the near future (Brooks, 2012; Leckart, 2012; Friedman, 2012).

III.   RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, what will be the storyline for the development of university education after the pandemic? Higher education experts give a variety of forecasts:

- students after a forced "habitation" in a virtual educational environment, visiting various open online platforms and familiarizing themselves with various online courses of leading universities and professors, may remain their regular listeners. The openness of online platforms with free courses contributes to the student's understanding of the convenience of independently building an individual educational trajectory in different variable forms (Chorosova, 2019; Prikhodko, 2020; Tabachuk, 2019);

according to the rector of National Research University "the Higher School of Economics", Y. Kuzminov, the massive transition to a distance learning format may lead to the emergence of integrator universities that will help the students build an individual educational path through the choice of online courses and recommend universities that recognize the chosen courses and issue diplomas;

universities will have to transform their educational space. Coworking and laboratories will become the most convenient places for studies. Such places will be easily reconstructed to meet the need and comfort for everyone instead of huge lecture halls (Milkus, 2020);

A clear distinction between main and additional education, as it is now, will disappear over time. According to this situation, the following constructed future scenario for the development of higher education may soon qualify for implementation. Students will choose courses taking into account skills which will be relevant to their professional and personal life activity. It won't be very important for students whether the course will be included in the curriculum of the main or additional educational program;

after the remote mode of operation, some of the training sessions, and meetings will retain their remote format as an effective means of replacing offline format that has proven itself in the new reality.

For several centuries, the education system tried to find a new format of education to replace the classroom–based learning system that has existed since the period of John Comenius as obsolete and does not meet the challenges of modern time. And now the period has come when reformatting of education systm is taking place through a combination of the optimal merger between online and offline education formats.

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