

**SCTCMG 2021**  
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of**  
**Modern Globalism»**

**IRRATIONAL PERCEPTION OF DISTANCE LEARNING BY**  
**STUDENTS**

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**Abstract**

The coronavirus pandemic has caused global changes in people's lives. Virtualization processes began to grow exponentially. Millions of people found themselves in a remote virtual work form, and as a result, their pace of living and self-perception changed. The authors analyze students' perception of distance learning, which has significantly increased in Russia after the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and consider objective and irrational conditions for assessing distance learning. We carry out the analysis of the study results conducted in 2020 with the help of a mass survey among young people aged 18 to 23 for distance education assessment in the digital world, development of virtual learning space, as well as structural-symbolic analysis of changes in education conditions and forms in the process of distance virtual education. Both rational and subjective strategies are identified to explain the nonavailability of students and teachers for distance learning. Study shows rather problem areas, difficulties and contradictions in the distance learning implementation in Russia in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. As one of the possible options, and reasonably expected vector for the future education of students in the distance form, it requires significant comprehensive thoughtfulness and elaboration at different levels. The authors outlined main tasks for distance learning optimization and development of its virtual forms for necessary experience obtaining.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Distance learning, educational process, irrationality, perception of learning, subjective assessments



## **1. Introduction**

The coronavirus pandemic has caused global changes in people's lives. Virtualization processes began to grow exponentially. Millions of people found themselves in a remote virtual work form, and as a result, their pace of living, self-perception, features of performing professional duties, etc., changed. This became the basis for new forms and strategies of self-presentation. They often had irrational foundations but made it possible to fit into the new social reality in a more constructive way. The education system is one of the areas where conditions and features of educational process have radically changed. Distance learning has become the minimum condition for maintaining health of teachers and students in quarantine. Distance learning is, first of all, the interaction of students and teachers with each other at a distance (remotely), while such distance learning reflects almost all components inherent in the educational process (methods, goals, organizational forms, content, and often training means), it is implemented by specific means of telecommunication technologies, providing interactivity of the learning process.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The issues of education virtualization have been raised for a long time in the world community. Various aspects of them are presented in the studies of such authors as Kapteev (2006) and Asanova (2019), who focused on the sociological aspects of intellectual space virtualization and the prospects for its future development; Tonkonog and Ananchenkova (2018), Ivanov (2016) who studied regional educational space virtualization based on distance learning system; about virtual universities of the future in the research of Kolesnikov and Polyushkevich (2012), Malykh (2019), on the education role in regional development in the works of Polyushkevich (2011), Polyushkevich and Kolesnikov (2013), Zhuravleva (2020), also in a number of the author's works, considered certain irrational aspects of virtual education (Ardashev, 2020).

## **3. Research Questions**

One important aspect is the introduction of virtual, distance learning forms step by step, both with technical equipment (both teachers and students) and sociocultural and socio-psychological (in mental preparation and public moods about new education forms, gradual adaptation and mastering them from basic models to more complex)

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

In practice, no higher education institution in Russia has switched to the full distance learning format until 2020. Distance learning by that time included advanced training and retraining courses, partly distance learning forms were used in teaching part-time students and only as an additional element of training with full-time students. The pandemic forced us to switch to a new work form within the shortest period of time. How do the students themselves assess its quality, process, conditions and results?

## 5. Research Methods

This question was at the bottom of our research, which took place at google.com survey platform in May-June 2020. 2.600 distance students from various Russian universities participated in it. The survey was disseminated through social networks and by authorized university representatives in all regions of the Russian Federation.

## 6. Findings

This allowed us to cover a large sample throughout Russia. Among the respondents there are 58% girls and 42% boys aged 18 to 23; 41% live in a hostel, 33% rent a room or apartment, and 26% live in their home with their parents or other family members.

Has distance learning lightened up various aspects of life for today's students? In general, no (see table 1).

**Table 1.** Impact of distance learning on various aspects of student life

Evaluation	In general, yes	In general, no	Do not know
More time for preparation	23.2	55.9	20.9
Learning mobility	15.5	62.1	22.4
More free time	13.3	75.6	11.1
Communication interactivity with the teacher	77.2	12.1	10.7
Constant contact with the teacher	83.1	11.8	5.1
Better digestion of the material	5.1	89.6	5.3
Possibility to gain knowledge without leaving home	35.5	39.7	24.8
Possibility to complete more tasks	12.2	49.9	37.9
No time waste on the road to the university and back	22.1	42.5	35.4
Possibility to find the information you need immediately in the Internet	47.9	19.9	32.2

There was no more time for preparation, the volume of tasks that must be completed increased, time regulations for completing tasks tightened, what is not always coherent with their equivalence. The learning mobility has become quite high, since training can take place both at home and in the country, in the car or somewhere else. The situation with the coronavirus has increased the multivariance of the student's workplace without detriment to class attendance. But at the same time, it did not in any way affect increasing the quality of acquired knowledge.

Several points are considered as negative aspects: 1) instability of the Internet and, as a result, interruption of communication and logic of the received information; 2) complexity of psychological perception of a large amount of information through gadgets; 3) complexity of adaptation and assimilation of the information received, which requires much more time to master the material heard.

Therefore, mobility in terms of workplace freedom is not compensated by the activity of received information assimilating. “More free time” and “more tasks to complete” is a big illusion. Due to the lack of comprehensiveness of distance learning programs, teachers provide more information than they did in regular training. For studying, mastering, adapting audio and video lectures, thematic information films, analytical programs, text materials, presentations and others, that the teacher prepared for classes, reduces the amount of free time very much.

The answer to the question about “better digestion of the material” and “possibility to gain knowledge without leaving home” has the lowest possible number of positive answers, this fact shows that modern students are not ready to master and assimilate large flows of information remotely, not by one subject, but by a whole complex. Distance education can be either an addition to personal learning or requires a different form of students’ socialization when the mastery of the material occurs through distance learning from the very first days. But in this case, we need to be prepared for the fact that the worldview, type of thinking, thinking strategies of people will be radically different from those that we have today. At the moment, personal communication, social interaction allows a person to remain human, to develop norms of prosocial behavior.

By removing personal contact, we can remove not only the humanistic component of the interaction process, but also the very principle of empathy and social reproduction.

Among the positive aspects of distance learning are the possibility of interactive interaction with the teacher and constant contact with the teacher, which allows you to receive answers through audio messages or chatting very quickly, which is usually accompanied by any messenger through which classes are taught.

Assessment of the knowledge level in the process of distance learning indicates deterioration in general. This suggests that the introduction of distance learning technologies requires a more thorough and systematic study (table 2).

**Table 2.** Assessment of the knowledge level in the process of distance learning

<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>In general, yes</b>	<b>In general, no</b>	<b>Do not know</b>
Knowledge has improved	13.4	65.4	21.2
Knowledge has deteriorated	56.5	12.2	31.3
Knowledge remained unchanged	33.4	31.1	35.5

Another aspect of the nonavailability of Russian university education for distant work is the nonavailability of specialized programs, the lack of teachers and students training to work with them. Only 13% of students have access to special distance learning programs, which are usually available in the capital's large universities (Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics, European University), with the exception of the regions’ leading universities (Irkutsk State University, Siberian Federal University, Tomsk State University, Novosibirsk State University, Far Eastern Federal University), the majority of regional universities use free programs that are publicly available on the Internet (Scape, Zoom) or even social networks (Vkontakte, Facebook). But even if there is a platform inside the university, teachers and students interact in other virtual spaces of various messengers (both

social networks (Vkontakte, Facebook) and phone programs for quick interaction (Viber, WhatsApp). The distribution is shown in more detail in table 3.

**Table 3.** Programs through which distance learning at a university is conducted (%) \*

Programs	Percentage
Internal program or university portal	18
Zoom free module	37
Vkontakte	19
Facebook	22
Scape	33
Viber	22
WhatsApp	16
Other	5

As negative aspects students identify several areas of dissatisfaction with distance learning: nonavailability of teachers (59.7%), nonavailability of students (40.3%). In other words, students state that teachers are no longer ready for distance learning than students themselves. They see them not being qualified and uncertain (see table 4)

**Table 4.** Sphere of dissatisfaction with distance learning (%)

	Spheres of dissatisfaction	Question percentage	Block percentage
Teachers	Nonavailability of teachers to present information in a distant format	33.2	59.7
	Lack of teachers' qualification in technical development of distance learning programs (lack of programs, computers, etc.).	26.4	
	Lack of necessary knowledge of students to technically master the process of distance learning	13.4	
Students	Lack of appropriate equipment for distance learning among students (from personal computers or other gadgets to the ability to install programs on those technical means that are available).	26.9	40.3

As can be seen from the table, both teachers (33.2%) and students (13.4%) are unwilling to present information and master it, but among teachers there are twice more rigid and inert teachers than among students (probably, this is due to age-related changes and unwillingness to change). Lack of technical means in the personal use of teachers (26.4%) and students (26.9%) is relevant for approximately the same number of both. In ordinary education, this factor was compensated by the presence of computers in departments, computer labs at universities. In a pandemic, it cannot be compensated, and a quarter of the participants in the educational process face technical problems. When asked what you fear in distance learning, we received most of the irrational answers – 80% and only 20% of rational reasons and arguments (see table 5).

**Table 5.** Concerns about distance learning (%)

	Spheres of dissatisfaction	Question percentage	Block percentage
Rational	I do not have technology (gadgets) to receive distance learning	8	20
	I do not have (regular) internet access	12	
Irrational	I may not understand something	19	80
	I may seem funny on camera	20	
	My classmates will laugh at me	18	
	I will forget to turn off the sound and they will learn something personal about me	13	
	Other irrational fears	10	

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, the study shows rather problem areas, difficulties and contradictions in the distance learning implementation in Russia in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. As one of the possible options, and reasonably expected vector for the future education of students in the distance form, it requires significant comprehensive thoughtfulness and elaboration at different levels. It is necessary to prepare both teachers and students for interactive communication; to form scientific programs according to new principles, to identify continuity and complexity in the preparation of students' homework assignments, to record the time for preparing assignments; technically provide both teachers and students with gadgets that make it possible to receive and master information with high quality through distance learning.

Moreover, irrational forms and strategies of distance learning perception lie rather in the nonavailability and not understanding how to optimize our personal learning space, subjectively increases personal concerns and fears. This is what generates false images and strategies of learning perception and can form negative assessments of learning itself. Distance learning is our future. And the faster we can resist the irrational perception strategies of this learning type, the more efficient we will be in the learning process.

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