INDIVIDUALIZATION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR MASTER'S STUDENTS IN RUSSIA AND FRANCE

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of study on the implementation of individualization during the transition of the educational process at universities of Russia and France to distance learning because of the pandemic. The study aimed to investigate the features of individualized distance learning of master's students on the example of master's degree program in pedagogy. A comparative analysis of the results of the survey on the problem of individualization in the conditions of distance learning was carried out. The survey involved over 160 university teachers in Russia and in France who deliver MA courses. The study analyzes the concepts of 'individualization' and 'personalization', which are currently widely used in education, and identifies the features of understanding the essence of these terms by Russian and foreign teachers. As a result, it was found that Russian and French teachers employ different learning technologies for individualization. The data obtained as a result of the survey can be used to improve the quality of education with regard to the experience of the two countries, and to improve the individualization process in the framework of distance and blended learning formats in higher education.

1. Introduction

In modern conditions, higher education, including pedagogical education, is focused on the development of each student, activation of personal resources of professional development, formation of abilities for self-realization, and operational adaptation to changing social conditions. In this study, personal and professional development is considered as a process based on the integrity of the personality and the unity of its manifestations in different spheres of life (Lyz & Lyz, 2012). A new challenge in the pandemic in 2020–2021 led to the global digitalization of higher education in the two countries: creation of a new information and communication educational environment, spread of electronic educational resources, development of distance education, and development of new models for information and communication technologies in the system of training and retraining of teachers. Thus, modern learning conditions are associated with information and communication technologies, which personalize education and adapt it to the student's needs (Vainshtein, 2019).

In addition, the modern realities of education require the abilities of self-organization and self-motivation, the development of which is facilitated by the process of individualization. Individualization in higher education requires various educational technologies, which are different in different countries. Comparison of technological approaches to individualization of the master's degree education in pedagogy in Russia and in France will help understand the general trends in the organization of education, and innovative practices in training of future teachers.

2. Problem Statement

In both Russia and France, the main principle of modern higher education based on a competent approach is student-centered learning, when a student becomes an active participant in the educational process and can choose his own educational route (Baidenko & Selezneva, 2011). Various models of student-centered learning associated with the concepts of individualization and personalization of education are being successfully implemented, for example, in the form of adaptive learning, free education, liberal arts, customized educational training programs (Leushin & Leushina, 2020). At the same time, individualization and personalization in Russian higher pedagogical education have become one of the leading principles of education only in recent years.

From a modern point of view, individualization implies orientation of the educational process towards maximizing of the student's capabilities, building the educational process with regard to the individual characteristics (character, temperament, interests, motivation, etc.), and optimizing variable forms and teaching methods to improve personal and professional qualities. According to Mityaeva (2004), individualization is determined by organization of the educational process, its content and appropriate teaching methods. In addition, individualization is considered as a set of techniques and actions, such as goal-setting, motivation, level of complexity, etc.

Individualization suggests that the student is the main subject of the educational process. Based on the educational needs and individual characteristics of students, learning is aimed at self-development in the space of educational opportunities, and the choice of educational content and educational routes (Belyakova & Zakharova, 2020).

According to Getman and Petrusevich (2014), individualization of learning is a personality-oriented approach that contributes to the development of the personality and individual qualities necessary for professional growth. At the same time, they insist that the concept of individualization must be considered as the interaction of two processes: personalization and personification.

Personalization of learning is achieved by creating individual educational routes, using certain forms and adaptive learning technologies, and forming an educational environment suitable for self-education and self-development of students (Bilenko, 2020).

At the same time, personalization of learning is understood as meeting the needs of the state, society and a person for the development of socially significant qualities that allow a person to effectively perform social and professional functions. Personification implies meeting the needs of each person for free manifestation of individual qualities in accordance with personal interests, views and attitudes (Getman & Petrusevich, 2014).

French scientists interpret the principle of individualization ambiguously. On the one hand, it is understood as the recognition of a person as a subject and active participant in his own educational route. On the other hand, it is defined as the recognition of a person as a bearer of knowledge acquired through experience and assessed by educational institutions and systems of continuous professional education (Maude, 2012). Individualization, according to Perrenoud (1993), implies the targeted and relevant adaptation of learning to different characteristics of the student, his capabilities, abilities and needs. According to foreign scientists, individualization is the creation of learning conditions that correlate with the needs of different students. At the same time, the goal of learning is similar for all students, but there is a possibility of flexible learning in accordance with the individual needs and abilities of students (Kuznetsova & Régnier, 2014).

The study considers the organization of the process of individualization of the master's degree education, which is the second stage in higher pedagogical education and requires methods of individualization and personalization of learning, since it provides initial pedagogical education, professional retraining or improving of qualifications for professional advancement in pedagogy (Brazhnik & Lebedeva, 2008).

It should be noted that in France the principle of individualization is a traditional approach. In the middle of the XX century, a noted French pedagogue Freinet (1964) introduced the ideas of individualization in education and suggested that education should be built in accordance with the needs, interests, goals and achievements of students. The Freinet's pedagogical approach is based on the differences between several types of intellectual abilities, which should be considered by the teacher to design further education, creating all the necessary conditions for the harmonious development of each student (Freinet, 1964).

In the XX century, the problem of individualization of learning was investigated by many Russian educators and psychologists such as Kirsanov (1982), Klarin (1987), Unt (1990). The main principle of individualization implies consideration of individual parameters aimed at the successful development of students.

Since the 90s of the XX century, individualization has been considered, first of all, in terms of personal and professional self-determination of students (Gerdo, 2011). At the same time, there was a shift

from unitarity to variability, delineation of the concepts of individualization and differentiation, and promotion of the personal development of each student. Individualization of learning should help solve the most important problems of modern higher pedagogical education. Thus, in addition to professional subject knowledge acquired from a modern teacher and from other specialists in the education system (educators, tutors, administration, etc.), students need values based attitude, critical thinking, and such personality qualities as leadership, initiative, creativity, adaptability. Implementation of general professional tasks requires a set of competencies: the ability for continuous self-education, communication in a multicultural society, ICT competence, etc. A sharp global transition of higher education to distance learning because of the pandemic has brought new problems associated with the quality of higher pedagogical education and provided conditions for the real organization of individualization of the educational process, which can have both advantages and difficulties in its implementation. Digital technologies create an educational environment with a variety of educational resources and content. The student must be ready for a high level of independence, not excluding the help of a teacher. In the context of distance learning, the ability to independently organize educational activities at all stages of the educational process, both in bachelor's degree and master's degree programs, is required.

3. Research Questions

Digital didactics contributes to individualization and personalization of the educational process, while promoting active and interactive forms and methods of teaching. The role of pedagogical technologies, teamwork, group and individual reflection, which have a complex structure and a certain internal scenario, is increasing (Bilenko, 2020). Despite the advantages, the process of remote individualization has a number of disadvantages. The study provides the responses of experienced teachers working in master's degree programs at universities in Russia and France to the following questions:

- how do university teachers of the two countries understand the process of individualization of education?
- how do teachers organize the process of individualization of learning in the master's degree education in a distance format?
- what difficulties arise during the implementation of the individualization process in a distance format?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the main advantages and difficulties during the implementation of individualization of learning in the master's degree pedagogical education in a distance format based on the opinions of university teachers from two countries, Russia and France.

5. Research Methods

The study employed the following research methods:

- theoretical analysis of scientific literature on the problems of individualization and personalization of education;
- comparative analysis of higher education in the studied countries and the results obtained,
- online survey of teachers from Russia and France, generalization, systematization, processing and interpretation of data.

6. Findings

6.1. Main characteristics of the study

To identify the problems and opportunities for organizing the process of individualization in the master's degree program in the context of distance learning, an online survey was conducted among teachers of pedagogical universities in Russia and in France. The survey was conducted in the format of virtual interaction. The questionnaire was sent to teachers via the Internet. More than 160 teachers were involved in the study. The study covered many universities in Russia and in France. The survey involved teachers from leading pedagogical universities: Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (St. Petersburg), Moscow State Pedagogical University, Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K.D. Ushinsky, Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after K. Minin, Tula State Pedagogical University named after L. N. Tolstoy, Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, Voronezh State Pedagogical University, Altai State Pedagogical University.

Teachers from different French universities took part in the online survey: Cergy Paris University, University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès, University of Lille, University of Evry, University of Paris Saclay, University of Picardy Jules Verne, Paris XII Val-de-Marne University, University of Paris, New Sorbonne University Paris III, University of Franche Comté, Paul Valery University of Montpellier III, Paris XIII University, University of Clermont Auvergne, University of Bordeaux, University of Lorraine, Cote d'Azur University, Claude Bernard University Lyon I, University of Strasbourg, University of Poitiers, University of Rennes.

The overwhelming majority of the Russian respondents are teachers working in the positions of associate professor (66%) and professor (22%). The teaching experience of the respondents varies from 11 to 30 years or more (92%). Over half of the French respondents are teachers working in the position of associate professor or an equivalent position (maître de conference, professeur agrégé), and 30% are professors (professeur des universités). A total of 20% of the respondents from France have other positions that give the right to teach in a higher education institution (for example, an academic teacher at the National Higher Institute of Professor and Education, a university teacher in the field of secondary education, etc.). The teaching experience of the French respondents ranges from 11 to 30 years or more (90%). The overwhelming majority of the surveyed teachers in Russia are females (86%), in contrast to France, where male respondents make up more than half (57%).

About half of the respondents in Russia (46%) teach disciplines in education and pedagogical sciences, 45% of the respondents are engaged in the social sciences and humanities programs. The rest of the respondents teach natural science and technical disciplines at pedagogical universities. Half of the respondents in France are engaged in pedagogical master's degree programs of professional orientation 'Professions in the field of education, upbringing and professional training' (Métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation or abbreviated MEEF), 20% are teachers of master's degree in the field of education, the rest of the respondents teach disciplines in the fields of humanitarian and social (27%) and natural (3%) sciences.

First, the teachers' understanding of the pedagogical term 'individualization' was investigated. After that, the ways and means (tools) of implementation of the process of individualization in distance learning at Russian and French universities were identified. Then, the difficulties in organizing the individualization process in the context of distance learning were determined. The final part of the survey aimed to identify the dynamics of changes in the assimilation of theoretical knowledge and practical skills by students and their motivation to study online during the implementation of the individualization process. Table 01 presents the percentage of some of the teachers' responses.

Table 1. Comparison of some of the survey results.

Question	Answer options	Russia	France
1. How do you understand the process of individualization? (multiple choice question)	organization of the educational process, the content of educational material, the choice of forms, methods and resources of teaching, control and assessment with regard to the individual characteristics of each student	69%	57%
	identification of problems or strengths in the development of a student and determination of methods for correction or further development	50%	50%
	promoting the maximum disclosure and self-disclosure of the potential for personal development	63%	37%
	dividing students according to their abilities into groups that differ in the volume and depth of the studied materials and provide different opportunities for further education and professional self-determination	20%	13%
	tutor support for a student in the educational process with regard to his subject experience	28%	67%
	development of the general cognitive abilities of a student based on his immediate development (within the framework of collective forms of education)	41%	30%
	Other	4%	7%
2. How do you implement the individualization process in a distance format? (multiple choice question)	flexibility of the pace of learning	41%	47%
	variability of educational content	61%	40%
	implementation of an individual curriculum	20%	20%
	task differentiation	69%	20%
	organization of students' independent work	70%	37%
	creating projects, solving research problems, cases	47%	43%
	Other	5%	17%

4. How, in your opinion, has the acquisition of theoretical knowledge changed in comparison with traditional learning?	improved significantly	5%	0%
	improved slightly	12%	13%
	no changes	33%	37%
	worsen slightly	38%	23%
	worsen significantly	9%	17%
	Other	3%	10%
5. How, in your opinion, has the acquisition of practical skills changed in comparison with traditional learning?	improved significantly	3%	7%
	improved slightly	14%	3%
	no changes	18%	20%
	worsen slightly	29%	23%
	worsen significantly	24%	20%
	it is impossible to develop practical skills in distance learning	9%	17%
	Other	3%	10%
6. How, in your opinion, has the motivation of students to study materials and complete assignments in your subject changed (in comparison with traditional learning)?	increased significantly	3%	0%
	increased slightly	21%	13%
	no changes	56%	47%
	decreased slightly	20%	37%
	decreased significantly	0%	3%

6.2. Discussion of the results of the online survey of teachers from Russia and France

In the concept of individualization, the Russian and French pedagogical communities put an emphasis on the independence, self-education and self-determination of each student, and transformation of all components of the educational environment (learning content, forms, methods and technologies) that contribute to development of the personality of each student and formation of his own educational route and, therefore, promotes his professional development. At the same time, individualization can be organized with regard to the external and internal aspects of the educational process. The first aspect includes educational and methodological support for the student's choice of methods to master the educational program, and the second aspect implies direct building of an individual educational route with due regard to educational interests, opportunities, pace of learning, etc.

According to French teachers, tutoring students in the educational process is an essential integral component of individualization. At the same time, when implementing individualization in a distance format, teachers, both in Russia and in France, emphasized the need for pedagogical support and counseling of students in the online educational process. The individual support and the assessment of the acquired knowledge and competencies identify each student's progress and educational gaps. The student guided by an experienced teacher can develop his own educational route with due regard to the educational interest, get help in case of learning difficulties, and identify suitable options for further self-development.

According to the results of the online survey, Russian and French teachers implement the process of individualization in a distance format in different ways. In Russia, the process of individualization of online

education is mainly carried out through independent work of students and the use of differentiation and variability. At the same time, the developed tasks provide the possibility of realizing individual experience, expressing an opinion, independent solving a professional problem, etc. This confirms the opinion of the Russian respondents about the autonomy and the targeted creation of situations by the teacher, when the student has to make an independent decision, as one of the key components of the process of individualization.

In French universities, this principle is implemented mainly through the establishment of the optimal rhythm and pace of learning in accordance with the needs of students. The flexibility of the pace and rhythm of learning is especially important in the context of distance learning, when an asynchronous format often takes place. In this case, educational platforms play a crucial role. Currently, there are many educational management systems, which make the learning process convenient. Some examples of such educational platforms used by universities include: Moodle, Open Education, Universarium in Russia, and M@gistère, Hyperplanning, eTwinning in France (Ilina, 2020). Recording of lectures and tasks with an interactive content provide the opportunity to study in a convenient way. Online communication with the teacher enables direct interaction of students with the teacher and provides feedback, counseling and pedagogical support in the virtual space.

The next question addressed to the respondents was aimed at identifying specific tools for implementation of the process of individualization in a distance format. Based on the survey results, Russian teachers often use in online classes: presentations (74%), video lectures and seminars (44%). Sometimes teachers use interactive forms of education (46%) and tests (46%), participate in online discussions to communicate with students, forums and chats (50%), and organize webinars and video conferences (44%). More than half of French teachers often use video conferences and webinars (63%), video lectures and online seminars (47%) in their professional activities, and 43% of teachers constantly use interactive forms of education.

At present, there is a wide variety of video and audio teaching materials, educational tools and platforms with an interactive content that are suitable for each field of science. According to the responses of the teachers, a wide range of tools for individualization of education includes: online digital resources, interactive learning materials (for example, TV programs and videos, online whiteboards, web quests, games, virtual tours and workshops). The teachers from France employ the e-portfolio method to stimulate the self-development of students and rethinking of achievements and identify gaps. In addition, some teachers use an interactive table of students' achievements when working in a group in order to monitor the progress and assess both the whole group and each student individually.

On the other hand, various tasks and learning technologies can contribute to the process of individualization in online classes. For example, Russian teachers mentioned dialogue technologies, advanced tasks, creative tasks (for example, creating videos on history and culture, analyzing documentaries, watching thematic programs, etc.), choice tasks, and individual tasks. Psychological and pedagogical tasks designed for the student to immerse in the practice of professional activity are important for the formation of future specialists. In addition, projects and their subsequent presentation in an online lesson or at a conference contribute to the student's thesis and develop the research skills. The responses of the French teachers indicated the need for regular oral presentations by students, presentation of reports,

and independent work. Oral tests after classes or before the next class in order to revise the material gives the teacher an idea of the assimilation of knowledge in a distance format and helps create the education route. Individualization of education can change the methods of teaching, for example, it can be work in micro-groups, optional classes or delegating teaching functions to students, such as conducting fragments of classes (motivation, goal-setting, reflection) or developing tests.

It should be noted that despite all the advantages of e-learning (associated with the flexibility of the time, place and pace of learning, etc.), interaction of the teacher with students is an integral part of the educational process. The pedagogical support and counseling of students at this stage is of great importance for the formation of future teachers. The majority of Russian teachers indicated the possibility of feedback for students through various modern instant messengers, forums and chats at any time. In addition, teachers use cloud storage to create and share electronic materials. However, as the respondents mentioned, the use of tools and teaching aids that contribute to individualization is negatively affected by high workloads of teachers, the lack of time for a thorough individual approach to each student in the educational process.

Teachers noted positive and negative aspects of distance learning. The advantages of distance learning include: flexibility of the pace of learning when working with educational materials, the possibility of a variety of content, interactive tasks (media projects, virtual laboratories, computer modeling, etc.), the possibility of automated quick assessment and control (tests, student rating, etc.). However, distance learning can hinder the process of individualization. According to the survey results, the following factors can be attributed to difficulties. Firstly, during the forced transition to distance learning because of the pandemic, teachers (as well as students) had to quickly master new software, work with educational platforms that provide educational materials and video communication. Secondly, distance learning often reveals technical problems: failures and interference during online sessions, poor quality of technical equipment in hostels, low speed of the Internet, technical problems caused by the remote location of students, etc, which result in a high workload and increased fatigue due to long-term work at the computer. Accordingly, there is less time left to check the individual works of students, taking into account the complexity of control of students in distance learning. Finally, as noted by the respondents from Russia and France, another problem is the concentration of students in the context of distance learning. It is difficult for the teacher to remotely maintain the interest and motivation of students, especially in the absence of feedback. In addition, a significant problem mentioned by both Russian and French teachers is the internal denial of online education at humanitarian universities and negative perception of distance learning by students, which can be expressed in the experience of loneliness and isolation due to lack or insufficient support.

Moreover, distractions are more common in distance learning (in particular, at home), and students quickly lose attention and concentration during online lectures, and sometimes delay their works, which significantly complicates assessment, and, hence, help to students. Therefore, teachers from both countries reported that the acquisition of practical skills worsened after the transition to distance learning. At the same time, Russian teachers noted a slight decrease in the assimilation of theoretical skills by students, in contrast to teachers from France, who stated that this parameter did not change. The majority of teachers from Russia and France noted that students' motivation was not affected by the transition to distance learning. However, teachers from Russia and France expressed different opinions on this issue: in Russia,

the motivation of students increased slightly in distance learning (22%), and in France, the motivation decreased (37%). According to the teachers, motivation decreased significantly among poorly organized and poorly motivated students, whereas motivated students were able to quickly adapt to the new conditions of distance learning.

Thus, according to teachers from Russian and French universities, the process of individualization and implementation of this process in practice require maintaining motivation in learning with regard to the personal scientific interest of students by ensuring the variability of tasks, choice of the topic of research projects and master's thesis. Taking into account the topic of master's theses when formulating assignments significantly contributes to students' motivation and increases a personal interest in completing assignments, the results of which can be used in further research work.

7. Conclusion

According to the survey results, in the concept of individualization, the Russian and French pedagogical communities put an emphasis on the independence and self-determination of each student, and transformation of all components of the educational environment (learning content, forms, methods and technologies) that contribute to the self-development of each student and formation of his individual educational route.

In practice, teachers use a wide range of educational tools and learning technologies. Digital technologies provide great opportunities in the design and implementation of the principles of individualization of learning (for example, a virtual portfolio for recording achievements, e-learning platforms as a cloud storage for educational resources and as a tool for online interaction between students and teachers).

The main difficulties noted by teachers from both Russia and France are associated with technical equipment, increased teaching loads, decreased concentration and motivation of students, and the difficulty in maintaining interest in the conditions of distance learning.

Acknowledgments

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