

Tetiana Zatonatska
Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor,
Economic Cybernetics Department,
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv,
Kyiv, Ukraine
tzatonat@ukr.net

Olga Anisimova
Ph.D., Senior Researcher,
State Scientific Institution «Institute of Educational Analytics»,
Kyiv, Ukraine
olgaanisimova@ukr.net

DISTANCE LEARNING THROUGH THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY – HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Abstract

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of a distance form of higher education becomes especially important, not only as a supplement to the usual, but also as an independent concept of a virtual university, i.e. the transfer of the entire educational process to cyberspace. To cover the maximum number of people wishing to receive educational services, we propose to use two models of organization of the educational process - synchronous and asynchronous.

Distance education is not a new phenomenon, but its development was limited by the means of communication available at the time. That is why it has received a particularly active boost with the development of information, communication, and computer technologies, which have created technical opportunities for this. For a long time, distance education developed in parallel with the provision of educational services in campus and was rather a supplement to the existing education system. Gradually, with the development of internationalization of education, the demand for distance learning began to grow, so higher education institutions began to offer separate programs in the distance format. This gave impetus to the creation of the concept of a virtual university, i.e. an institution that provides educational services exclusively in a distance format.

At the present stage, the COVID-19 pandemic has created the need for deeper development of the distance education system, as higher education institutions

campuses have become one of the possible centers for the spread of the disease. Moreover, the provision of additional anti-epidemic security measures is quite costly, so it leads to an increase in the operational costs of the HEIs. Given the declining overall income level, rising tuition costs can cause a sharp drop in demand for higher education, so it is not always the best option for higher education providers. A possible solution to this problem is the development of the concept of a virtual university, i.e. a higher education institution, which from the very beginning has minimal physical assets and is located mainly in cyberspace.

The development of private higher education institutions in recent years has led to the fact that these institutions function as ordinary for-profit organizations, meaning they must adhere to the principles of sustainable growth. This means that for their further development they must be profitable. As the main source of income for them is tuition fees, and the main items of expenditure are the costs of organizing the educational process, so the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant increase in the costs of educational institutions without further increasing the number of students. Moreover, sometimes political motives hindered the free movement of foreign students, so the higher education institutions lost their income.

As a result, the concept of organizing the provision of higher education services in the form of a virtual university is becoming increasingly promising. The virtual university model assumes the existence of real premises for the organization of the office and the technical aspect of providing virtual learning (e.g., servers, virtual lecture halls, etc.) and the transfer of other structural units to the cyberspace, meaning the virtual libraries, virtual laboratories and online lectures and seminars.

There are two most common models of virtual university organization - synchronous and asynchronous. The first involves the transfer of the educational process into virtual reality with the preservation of all its basic elements, such as the presence of a clear schedule of classes, consultations with professors, mastering the material of the proposed courses. The main advantage of this model is the provision of constant motivation of the student, as he has certain time intervals for attending classes, completing tasks, and has the opportunity for simultaneous personal communication not only with the professor but also with other participants of the learning process. The asynchronous model of the organization provides an individual training schedule. In

fact, the HEI offers online lectures that can be listened to at any time, not in real time, one-on-one consultations with the professors and only a few pre-arranged group classes. The main advantage of this model is its flexibility, which allows you to combine training with work, as well as allows the HEIs to save on technology needed to organize the learning process.

Currently, the main obstacle to the development of virtual universities is the issue of obtaining standard diplomas and their recognition at both national and international levels. Without wider legal recognition of degrees obtained in virtual universities, the development of distance education will be constantly hampered, although in a pandemic, this form of education is the safest and most promising.

References

1. Aoki, K., & Pogroszewski, D. (1998). Virtual university reference model: A guide to delivering education and support services to the distance learner. *Online journal of distance learning administration*, 1(3), 1-15.
2. Barker, P. (2020). Electronic course delivery, virtual universities and lifelong learning. *AACE Review (formerly AACE Journal)*, 14-18.
3. Salmerón-Manzano, E., & Manzano-Agugliaro, F. (2018). The higher education sustainability through virtual laboratories: The Spanish university as case of study. *Sustainability*, 10(11), 4040.
4. Shahtalebi, S., Shatalebi, B., & Shatalebi, F. (2011). A strategic model of virtual university. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 28, 909-913.