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UKRAINIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ABOUT DISTANCE EDUCATION

UKRAINIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION (BASED ON THE RESULTS OF A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY)

Keywords: distance education, secondary school, students, COVID-19.

The article addresses the issue of the implementation of distance education in the final year of secondary school. The author pays special attention to the attitude of secondary school students, who are a key subject of the educational process, to the introduction of distance education. The empirical basis of the study includes the results of a study carried out among the students of the 11th grades in Kharkiv, Odesa, Cherkasy and Ivano-Frankivsk, which was conducted 1.5 years after the introduction of online education. Key problems associated with the introduction of distance education were identified: the rejection of distance learning as a format suitable for basic education, and the lack of sufficient communication with teachers and classmates. Such problems lead to the perception of this mode as anomalous, forced and temporary. The author points out that there are different attitudes towards distance learning, which depend on the availability of optimal distance learning instruments (technological aspect),

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the experience of online learning before lockdown (competence aspect), general attitude towards the learning process, academic performance and the amount of time that students usually spend on homework (educational aspect proper).

UKRAIŃCY UCZNIOWIE SZKÓŁ ŚREDNICH O KSZTAŁCENIU NA ODLEGŁOŚĆ

Słowa kluczowe: kształcenie na odległość, szkoła średnia, uczniowie, COVID-19.

Artykuł porusza problematykę realizacji kształcenia na odległość w ostatniej klasie liceum. Autor zwraca szczególną uwagę na stosunek uczniów szkół średnich, jako kluczowego podmiotu procesu edukacyjnego, do wprowadzenia kształcenia na odległość. Podstawą empiryczną badania są wyniki projektu realizowanego wśród uczniów ostatnich klas w Charkowie, Odessie, Czerkasach i Iwano-Frankowsku, przeprowadzonych 1,5 roku po wprowadzeniu edukacji online. Zidentyfikowano kluczowe problemy związane z wprowadzeniem kształcenia na odległość: odrzucenie kształcenia na odległość jako formy odpowiedniej dla kształcenia podstawowego, brak wystarczającej komunikacji z nauczycielami i kolegami z klasy. Konsekwencją takich problemów jest postrzeganie tego trybu jako anormalnego, wymuszonego i tymczasowego. Autor zwraca uwagę na istnienie różnych postaw wobec uczenia się na odległość w zależności od dostępności optymalnych instrumentów do uczenia się na odległość (aspekt technologiczny), doświadczenia uczenia się online przed kwarantanną (aspekt kompetencyjny), ogólnego stosunku do procesu uczenia się, wyników w nauce i ilość czasu, jaką uczniowie zwykle poświęcają na pracę domową (właściwy aspekt edukacyjny).

COVID-19 has greatly accelerated the introduction of distance technologies into the educational process. This fact became a part of the development processes of the educational sphere in various countries. According to UNESCO data, in the spring of 2020, the educational process was suspended in educational institutions of 165 countries (UNESCO 2020). Secondary education in Ukraine was no exception: school vacations were introduced for two weeks. The further transition to the distance type of education was a forced act, implemented within a very short time, which was an additional challenge for the education system.

The mass transition to online education led to significant changes in the education of high school students. Secondary schools were less prepared for the introduction of educational technology than other subsystems. An additional difficulty was the organization of education in high schools, as the education of graduates is aimed at preparing them to enter higher education institutions. High school students in Ukraine found themselves in a problematic situation of a double blow: unpreparedness for the school educational system and the high requirements of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) pass.

From the epistemological point of view, the presence of the digitalization of education has significantly increased the number of publications on distance learning. Many works of Ukrainian and foreign researchers reveal the problems of deepening educational and digital inequality (Boelens et al. 2018; Chan 2020; Gonzalez-Betancor et al. 2021), the attitude of actors in the higher education system (teachers and students) to the transformation of higher education (Chernysh, Prikhodko 2020; Mospan 2021; Aucejo et al. 2020; Soria et al. 2020), the operation of massive open online courses in a situation of competition with traditional higher education institutions (AlQaidoom, Shah 2020; Bali 2014), the introduction of mixed learning technologies after overcoming the COVID-19 (Bao 2020; Heilporn et al. 2021). It is easy to see that a vast majority of publications focus on the specifics of the implementation of online education in institutions of higher education, while the social consequences of distance learning in secondary schools are hardly studied. The main material of the few publications which are devoted to this topic is concerned with the study of the problems in which secondary school teachers find themselves (Damşa et al. 2021).

So, the main goal of our work is to fill the gap in the study of the attitude of high school students as a significant subject of the educational process of distance learning. We addressed several research questions: What platforms are most often used during learning? How are educational practices being transformed? Is academic achievement changing in the Ukrainian secondary education system, in which a significant factor of educational motivation is getting a grade?

We used the materials of the field study "High School Student – 2021: Everyday Practices and Life Plans" conducted by instruments of an online survey among high school students in regional centres located in different parts of Ukraine: Kharkiv (N=477; Eastern Ukraine), Odesa (N=353; Southern Ukraine), Cherkasy (N=300; Central Ukraine) and Ivano-Frankivsk (N=400; Western Ukraine). The research was conducted in

October-November 2021 by the Sociological Association of Ukraine under
the leadership of Prof. L. Sokuryanska. The sample consisted of pupils of
the 11th (final) grade of several secondary schools, selected at random in
each administrative district of the city. The peculiarity of the array is the
measurement of the attitude of students in big cities. This fact constitutes
certain specificity of the results, which do not claim to be represented within
the whole of Ukraine. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this paper, the
study materials in Ivano-Frankivsk had not been processed, so we use below
the available results of the survey in Kharkiv, Odesa and Cherkasy.

What can a secondary school student's attitudes toward the
implementation of distance learning depend on? The process of online
learning in school is complex and involves several dimensions, and the
success of adaptation depends on success in each of these dimensions. In
general, we have identified several aspects: *technological* (availability of
devices through which one can access educational platforms), *competence*
(availability of skills to handle the gadget and experience in distance
learning) and *educational* proper (attitude to the learning process, which the
current high school students had mostly formed in the process of learning
in a face-to-face format).

To study the attitudes of secondary school students towards the
educational process, some statements were used about different aspects of
distance learning: opportunities for a deeper study of subjects, for getting
better grades, and the perception of distance learning as a form which, for
various reasons, is more suitable for out-of-school learning, communication
problems arising during training, the general/private ratio, and students'
vision of the prospects for distance learning in secondary and higher schools.
A Likert scale was used in constructing the indicators, which provided
a scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") for the degree
of agreement with the statements. Table 1 presents the average scores.

A common characteristic of the surveyed students is emphasizing the
forced nature of the transition to distance learning: like any rapid process
that transforms an established social institution, it became a kind of
shock for all the subjects of the educational process. It is noteworthy that
1.5 years after the start of "forced distance learning" this characteristic
remains dominant in the evaluations of students. We assume that this
indicates the perception of distance learning as a temporary and "abnormal"
phenomenon. Respectively, after the epidemic situation stabilizes, according
to the respondents' point of view, the previous format of education will be
restored. Distance learning has not become a normal reality for students
whose main cycle of education was in the normal mode.

Table 1

Degree of agreement of high school students with the statements about the peculiarities of distance learning in high school (in averages)

	Kharkiv	Odessa	Cherkasy
Distance learning is necessary during quarantine	4.1	4.2	4.0
Distance learning allowed you to improve your grades in school subjects	4.0	3.9	2.6
During distance learning, there was a lack of live contact with classmates	3.5	3.6	3.9
Distance learning is not suitable for basic education, but only useful for mastering skills in a narrow direction	3.2	3.4	3.5
During distance learning, there was a lack of live communication with teachers	3.1	3.4	3.6
After distance learning, you are afraid of the results of the IEE	3.0	3.5	3.2
Distance learning has allowed you to explore subjects deeper than face-to-face teaching	3.0	2.6	2.4
During distance learning, there were frequent problems connecting to the service	3.0	2.9	2.4
Distance learning is only good for out-of-school learning	3.0	3.0	3.2
Schools in the modern world should exist mainly in the distance learning format	2.8	2.4	2.3
Distance learning during quarantine – it was more like a vacation	2.8	2.7	3.0
When applying to a higher education institution, you will choose one that offers distance learning	2.6	2.2	2.3
Distance learning is more fun than learning	2.3	2.1	2.8

Source: authors' work.

A lot of respondents emphasized problems with being able to establish ongoing communication with other students (somewhat more frequently) and teachers (somewhat less frequently). This fact indicates a perception of "live communication" in a co-presence situation as an integral part of the normal learning process.

Also, a common statement became the opinion that the format of online education is not suitable for teaching all subjects, so, it is suitable

for teaching only some disciplines. Unfortunately, the limited scope of the questionnaire, which was completed by students online, did not allow us to specify a list of subjects that, according to students, can be adapted to online learning. We will try to reveal this aspect in the following studies.

We paid attention to the peculiarities of the perception of distance learning in different regional centres. The different evaluation of the statement that online learning has affected the academic performance of high school students was unexpected for the present author: about 70% of Kharkiv and Odesa students said that this learning format allowed them to improve their grades (only 44% of high school students in Cherkasy agreed with them). We can assume that either teachers have significantly lowered the requirements for the assignments, or students have become more motivated to perform them. In this connection, it is interesting that only 34% of Kharkiv and 27% of Odesa students agree or rather agree with the statement that the distance format allowed them to study subjects more deeply than face-to-face instruction.

As an elaboration of research into schoolchildren's experience of distance learning, we decided to find out whether they had any experience with online education before the quarantine began. The results vary significantly depending on the city of study: 20% of schoolchildren in Cherkasy, 26% of schoolchildren in Odesa, and 32% of schoolchildren in Kharkiv had such an experience. We have found some dependence of the estimates of the distance learning format on the experience of online learning. So, Kharkiv students more often say this format is more suitable for out-of-school education (40% and 29% respectively); that they lack live contact with the teacher (51% and 40% respectively); and that they are ready to continue learning in an online format at the higher school (24% and 17% respectively). Odessa students who were able to compare distance learning in school with their previous learning experiences also noted a significantly decreased intensity of communication with teachers (64% and 50%, respectively). Thus, the assessments suggest that teachers in Kharkiv and Odesa should make more effort during distance learning. In turn, Cherkasy schoolchildren with experience in online learning are less ready to agree that this format is more like a vacation. We hypothesize that such evaluations demonstrate greater awareness of high school students with the experience of online learning in the question of the organization of the learning process: probably, they are more adapted to the situation when the responsibility for the results of their learning depends more on their efforts than on the educational institution. We will be able to test this hypothesis in the following studies.

The results of the study showed that school institutions' choice of the learning platform is related to the city in which the school institution is located. The most popular platform for teaching high school students is Google Classroom, which integrates the capabilities of video communication during the study session, posting information permanently and forming tasks for students. Zoom (especially in Kharkiv and Odesa) and Skype (especially in Cherkasy) are very popular. Many teachers preferred e-mail and messengers (Telegram, Viber).

Table 2

Online platforms used by students during distance learning (% of respondents)

	Kharkiv	**Odessa**	**Cherkasy**
Zoom	97.3	94.7	30.9
Moodle	1.7	2.4	9.3
8*8	0.4	2.1	1.4
Google Classroom	79.0	74.8	80.8
e-mail	27.7	32.8	51.5
Viber	46.3	56.5	34
Telegram	64.8	23.7	44.3
Skype	23.5	12.1	50.5

Source: authors' work.

In the Ukrainian educational system, the amount of time that needs to be spent on homework increases with the transition to high school. Especially "loaded" is the study in the final grades of high school, as students are preparing for the Independent External Evaluation, the success of which determines their chances of entering a higher educational institution for a budget form of study (i.e. for free for the student). Thus, the structure of the Ukrainian educational system motivates students to study and succeed. As the results of our study show, the number of hours spent on homework directly correlates with academic performance: more than 80% of top achievers (those who typically receive from 10 to 12 points on a 12-point grading scale) spend at least 2 hours a day on homework. However, the external motivator coming from the educational institution is not enough to successfully absorb the knowledge offered by the school curriculum. The essential value for successful learning at school (regardless of the format of learning itself) is the motivation of the schoolchildren to study independently. So, as an indicator of motivation, we took a subjective indicator of attitude to learning.

We have studied the relationship between the amount of homework and attitudes towards certain characteristics of distance learning. Let us note a significant regional specificity of the answer to this question: we could not find significant correlations with the answers of Kharkiv schoolchildren, but we found significant correlations for the schoolchildren of Odesa and Cherkasy.

The results of the study showed that those students who are used to independent organization of academic work considerably better assess distance learning. Thus, we found a significant correlation with the statements that schools in the modern world should exist mainly in the online format (Spearman coefficient[1] is 0.13), as well as disagreement with the fact that this format is suitable only for mastering narrow skills and is not suitable for basic education[2]. Schoolchildren in Cherkasy have similar opinions: they more often agree that the online mode helped them learn school subjects more deeply and that school education is better to be conducted in this format[3]. In addition, they are less likely than their classmates to perceive online learning as a vacation[4] or entertainment[5]. They are also less concerned about the impact of distance learning on their IEE[6]. Thus, one can conclude, that self-study skills through homework play a positive role in shaping the learning process.

Using a correlation analysis we examined whether attitudes toward distance learning correlate with students' emotions and feelings about schooling in general. We concluded that an integral part of involvement in the learning process is the formation of a network of intensive communication with other educational actors (classmates and teachers): thus, students who express a positive attitude towards learning in secondary school, more often than others mention a lack of contact with teachers and classmates as a significant problem of distance learning[7]. Assessment of other characteristics of distance learning showed significant differences: so, the students in Kharkiv and Odesa are less likely to agree that schools should exist mainly in a distance format[8], that they are ready to enter higher education institutions that offer a distance learning format[9] and that

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[1] Here and below, the correlation coefficients are given for significance at the level 1%

[2] Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.12

[3] Spearman's correlation coefficient is 0.3

[4] Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0,34

[5] Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.4

[6] Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.12

[7] Spearman's correlation coefficient ranges from 0.33 to 0.345

[8] Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.18 and -0.26, respectively

[9] Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.13

online learning allowed to deepen knowledge about the subject. Cherkasy schoolchildren who enjoy learning have a more positive attitude to online learning and show agreement that online learning is not like a vacation or entertainment[10], and somewhat more often show agreement that schools should exist mainly in the format of online learning and that they are ready to enter higher educational institutions that will offer a distance learning program[11].

Summing up, we note that the organization of distance learning in high school, on the one hand, opens up significant educational opportunities (expanding the choice of the educational trajectory of students, the appearance of additional time to deepen knowledge on the topics of interest, greater opportunities to test alternative teaching methods, caused by the fact that teachers often use interactive online materials), on the other hand – is currently a less effective form of learning comparatively with traditional methods of offline education.

This was exactly the ambivalence that we found during the study: on the one hand, we identified a group of students who were better adapted to online learning, on the other hand, the least involved in the learning process part of the students perceived this format rather as "incomplete", to some extent forced break between the normal periods of learning. We identified in our previous research (Borysov, Sheremet 2019) a significant increase in the risk of deepening inequality between groups of students – traditional factors, including some ascriptive student statuses (primarily the economic and cultural capital of their families). And these risks are reinforced by technological inequalities (directly dependent on the financial well-being of the family) and the level of digital competence. On the one hand, exacerbating educational risks may provoke a drop in students' school performance. On the other hand, as many high school students from Kharkiv and Odesa note, the introduction of the online learning format allowed them to improve their grades. This indicates that the assessment of school works by teachers is becoming less objective: we are dealing with the dysfunction of assessment as a regulator of relations between the subjects of the educational process. This means increasing the polarization between groups of high school students by level of their knowledge while maintaining the appearance of normal distribution of grades.

In our future works, we plan to focus on the study of the transformation of the criteria for evaluating the learning outcomes by the school teachers under the conditions of implementing the distance education format.

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[10]Spearman's correlation coefficient for both variables fluctuates at the level -0.23
[11]Spearman's correlation coefficient for both variables fluctuates at the level 0.18

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