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STAGES OF ORGANIZING DISTANCE COURSES

Distance education is becoming more and more popular in the modern world. Recent events related to coronavirus infection have only accelerated the development of all its forms.

Today there is no need to mention all the advantages of distance learning, it is enough to mention two of them: accessibility and openness, which makes it possible to study remotely from the place of study, without leaving your home or office, and allows a modern specialist to study almost all his life, without special business trips, holidays, combining with the main activity, while focusing on training in the evenings and on weekends. You can study from almost anywhere in the world where there is a computer and the Internet.

According to the Code of the Republic of Belarus "On Education", the distance form of education is understood as "a type of extramural education, when education is obtained mainly using modern communication and information technologies". According to this definition, educational institutions cannot use distance learning as a separate form, but only as a form extramural studies. This approach limits the use of distance learning and the ability of teachers to gain and accumulate full-fledged experience in organizing and conducting distance learning.

The experience of organizing distance courses was gained by teachers of the Institute for Professional Skills Upgrading and Retraining of "Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno", thanks to their participation in the implementation of the international technical assistance project "Enhancement of Lifelong Learning in Belarus within the framework of the Erasmus+ program "Capacity Building in Higher Education: BELL (586278-EPP-1-2017-1-LV-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP). Project goal is development and improvement of lifelong education in Belarus with the effective use of distance learning and the tools of the Bologna process for the development of the regional labor market.

Within the framework of the project, together with other Belarusian universities, we organized and conducted distance courses in various areas: "Information Security", "English Language", "Fundamentals of Entrepreneurial and Financial Literacy", "Fundamentals of Legal Literacy", "Energy and Resource Saving at Home as a direction to reduce utility bills". The purpose of this article is to familiarize with the stages of organizing distance courses that the project participants took.

The process of implementing distance courses can be divided into the following stages:

1. Preparatory stage. At this stage, the experience of European universities, which were also participants in the project, was studied. Groups of teachers from the Institute visited various European universities (Great Britain, Spain, Sweden, Latvia) and participated in seminars to familiarize themselves with their experience in organizing distance learning.

2. The process of preparing training materials. In preparing the training materials, the experience of the Open University in the UK was taken as a basis, the essence of which is the division of all material into modules. The peculiarity of these modules is that the student-centered modules are at the center of the entire educational process

(student-centred modules). This further determines the structure and content of educational modules.

Before creating a training module, an analysis of the target audience and modeling of a potential student (student profile) is performed, taking into account his age, level of education, interests and preferences, opportunities and limitations. This approach allows us to assume and formulate the results (learning outcomes) that the student predictably expects to receive upon graduation. Further, these results determine the content of the training module and the student's activities.

Key ideas underlying the development of the module:

— learning is an active process;

— assessment is a part of the educational process;

— training should be phased and at each stage a student focuses on specific types of activities, which allows him to successfully advance.

The module is divided into topics. Each topic is allocated a certain number of hours (weeks), depending on its importance and complexity. In the process of developing a module, it is determined what types of activities students will carry out during the study of each topic, as well as their percentage. It was repeatedly emphasized at the seminar that the Open University does not set itself the task of transferring simply knowledge to the student, the essence of the teaching process is its practical application.

Much attention is paid to the assessment of knowledge and skills. The purpose of the assessment is not to control knowledge, but to establish feedback with the student in order to obtain objective and timely information about the problems and intermediate learning outcomes for timely adjustment of the educational process.

3. The process of preparing content and posting on the Internet. Distance learning was implemented by us in the Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle. According to information from the official Moodle website, more than 60% of all educational institutions in the world

use it. This system has built-in tools for developing training courses and allows you to create and use a wide variety of elements for content creation. To present the material, organize feedback, control the completed tasks, we used various elements of the LMS Moodle (lecture, glossary, task, chat, forum, test, hyperlink, SCORM package). However, no matter how varied the capabilities of the Moodle system, no matter how large the number of proposed content creation tools, the system cannot exclusively satisfy all the requests of course developers. This is especially true when developing training courses that provide distance learning. The lack of direct communication with the teacher should be compensated for by the most visual teaching materials with visualization capabilities. When participants of the Project visited the University of Cadiz, Spain, a large number of additional software tools for content creation were presented in addition to the LMS Moodle tools: Active Presenter, H5P, eXeLearning, Hot Potatoes, LAMS, Kahoot, Socrative. Most of these software tools were used by us for content development, and the results are integrated into LMS Moodle.

4. Direct learning process. Before the start of distance learning, a meeting of students was held, at which they were given passwords, introduced to the conditions and requirements, and also conducted entrance classroom sessions (2–4 hours). The training of the trainees took about four months.

5. Analysis of the conducted distance courses and improvement of the structure and quality of training materials. At this stage, the information collected through the feedback is analyzed, the comments of the project coordinators are taken into account and the appropriate adjustments are made.

After the implementation of the first set of data for distance courses, we made the following conclusions: the development of a high-quality distance course is a complex and time-consuming process that requires a teacher, who is, among other things, a developer, a large number of

skills in different areas: pedagogy, psychology, information technology. Practice shows that many teachers lack knowledge and skills in the field of information technology. Consequently, if universities want to develop distance learning, work should be organized to train teachers who will do this. In addition, developing quality content for distance learning is a long process that can take years, during which continuous improvement is required.

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