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DISTANCE LEARNING: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

It is not a secret that in the modern world, Internet learning is a convenient way to share knowledge anywhere without leaving home. It is enough to have a personal computer (laptop, tablet, mobile phone) and Internet access at hand. Given the unfavorable epidemiological situation in the world, this form of education is particularly relevant and allows saving not only time, but also the health of students.

In the Republic of Belarus, *distance education is a form of correspondence education, where education is carried out mainly using modern communication and information technologies* (part 2 of paragraph 3 of article 17 of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus) [1]. That is, it acts as an integral part of the correspondence form and is not a separate form of education. In fact, it is an auxiliary tool that complements traditional forms of education.

The legal term “distance education” should not be confused with the term “distance learning,” which is widely used in the educational environment in interactive learning. The latter is also based on the use of modern information and communication technologies and tools, including interactive computer programs, the Internet, e-mail, etc. But if the distance form of obtaining education is the process of transferring (broadcasting) knowledge, for which the teacher and educational institution are responsible, the distance learning is the process of obtain-

ing knowledge through the student's independent cognitive activity, and therefore it is he who is self-responsible for the result. Thus, these concepts from the point of view of Belarusian law are not identical.

In the modern Belarusian educational environment, distance learning as a method of obtaining knowledge is becoming more and more widespread. Thus, the Order of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Belarus from 29.11.2017 № 742 approved the Conceptual Approaches to the development of the education system of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the future until 2030 [2]. In the mentioned normative legal act in the first section it is noted that *"...Belarus is rightfully considered a state where the principle of continuity of education — "education through life"..."* is implemented.

The document encompasses all levels of education — from preschool to special. But in the context of the present study we will focus on the additional adult education.

Thus, one of the most important trends in education in recent decades is the transition from one-time qualification for life to the assimilation of competencies that contribute to self-study and the need for learning and self-improvement throughout life. And this can be ensured not only in the framework of educational programs of professional education and retraining, but also, in particular, in training courses, trainings and other educational events aimed at satisfying the cognitive needs of students in a certain area of their life or knowledge.

Among a number of main tasks in the field of additional education of adults is the development of distance form of additional education. And the mechanism for the implementation of the tasks until 2020 and in the future until 2030 provides for the development and approval of the regulatory framework for distance learning in the system of additional education for adults, the design of educational programs based on a competency-based approach and modular principle and other activities.

The information and communication environment of the educational space is identified as a separate issue in the document. It is assumed that

the digital transformation of the educational sector will create national information and educational environment, which, in turn, will lead to an increase in the intellectual and creative abilities of students, to improve the professional skills of teachers, will provide wide access and introduction of innovative methods based on information technology into the educational process. One of the promising areas of focus here is the deployment of a multimedia platform to ensure the availability of modern information resources and remote provision of educational content to participants in the educational process.

We believe that from the above fragmented analysis of the Conceptual Approaches to the Development of the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and for the future until 2030, it can be concluded that the development of distance learning using modern communication and information technologies is very relevant and timely. And the project “Enhancement of Lifelong Learning in Belarus/BELL” is at the forefront of the information and communication environment of the educational space of the Republic of Belarus.

Like any phenomenon, distance learning has both positive and negative sides. Thus, the benefits of such training can be attributed: 1) free access and mobility; 2) reduced costs of learning; 3) flexibility of learning and the ability to develop in step with the times; 4) potentially equal learning opportunities and objective criteria for evaluating knowledge.

However, there are some difficulties in distance learning. Firstly, the student needs strong motivation, because he learns almost all the educational material on his own; 2) limited personal communication of students with each other and with the teacher; 3) user identification problem; 4) insufficient computer literacy.

And as the practice of implementing the above-mentioned project has shown, these difficulties are present during on-line training of learners despite its free access.

To improve distance learning within the project, and what isn't less important, to ensure its sustainability it is desirable to further take into account the Provision on training courses of the additional education of

adults approved by the Regulation of Council of ministers of Republic of Belarus of 15.07.2011 No. 954 (further — Provision) [3].

Thus, in accordance with paragraph 2 of the Provision, training courses are an educational event aimed at satisfying the cognitive needs of students in a certain field of professional activity or field of knowledge.

Mastering the content of the educational program of such courses is not aimed at acquisition of a profession, retraining and professional development of managers, specialists, workers (employees).

Paragraph 9 of the Regulation provides that fee-based educational services are to be concluded with trainees who master the content of the educational programme of the courses on a paid basis. Paragraph 11 stipulates that persons are accepted for training regardless of their education. Enrolment is made by issuing an order.

The document confirming the student’s mastery of the content of the educational program of training courses is a certificate of training. At the same time, it should be remembered that the certificate of training in the prescribed form, as well as various certificates, and other documents of their own standard are not documents of state standard, confirming the assignment of qualification, category of profession and the right to perform the relevant work. This is due to the fact that training at courses may be aimed only at meeting the cognitive needs of citizens, and not at awarding the professional qualification.

In developing and design of the online courses we used the experience of the Open University of Great Britain, the largest academic institution in UK. The Open University offers a wide range of courses at various levels — from certificates and diplomas to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. At the undergraduate level, qualifications available include:

- Undergraduate certificate — equivalent to $\frac{1}{3}$ of a bachelor’s degree.
- Undergraduate diploma — equivalent to $\frac{2}{3}$ of a bachelor’s degree.
- Bachelor’s degree without honours — equivalent to $\frac{5}{6}$ of a bachelor’s degree.

— Bachelor's degree with honours — full bachelor's degree.

Similar qualifications are offered at the graduate level:

— Graduate certificate — equivalent to $\frac{1}{3}$ of a master's degree.

— Graduate diploma — equivalent to $\frac{2}{3}$ of a master's degree.

— Master's degree — full master's degree.

It is worth mentioning that an Open University degree has the same status as one from any top UK university. Recognition outside the UK may differ, however. Happily, many employers and organisations worldwide do employ Open University graduates and understand that an OU degree is equal in academic standard to a degree from any other British university [4].

We believe that the order established in the Regulation will correspond to the distance courses of the project “Enhancement of Lifelong Learning in Belarus/BELL” to the greatest extent possible. And the issue of the final legal document — certificate of training — will serve as an additional motivation factor for the successful completion of online training courses.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. The Code on education of the Republic of Belarus (2020). Consultant Plus: Belarus, Minsk.
2. Conceptual approaches to educational development of Republic of Belarus till 2020 and on prospect till 2030: approved the Order of the Minister of Education of Republic of Belarus of 29.11.2017 No. 742 (2017). Consultant Plus: Belarus, Minsk.
3. Provision on training courses of the additional education of adults: approved by the Regulation of Council of ministers of Republic of Belarus of 15.07.2011 No. 954 (2011). Consultant Plus: Belarus, Minsk.
4. *Recognition in my country*. — Retrieved: <https://www.open.ac.uk>.