

CHANGES OF TEACHER-STUDENT/STUDENTS COMMUNICATION IN STUDY PROCESS: CONTEXT OF REMOTE TEACHING / LEARNING

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Abstract

The global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 has brought about changes in all areas of our lives, including the higher education system. The global and very rapid transition to distance learning, the development and development of distance learning courses, the review of study schedules are just a small list of activities that needed to be done to manage the unusual situation and ensure the quality of studies. No less important, as it turned out later, were not only the external changes in the organization of the study process and their communication in the organization, but also the changes in the communication itself among all participants in the study process, especially among students and teachers. This is clearly confirmed by the qualitative and quantitative research conducted in our institution in 2020 and 2021, which revealed how students and teachers assessed the quality of distance learning, what challenges they faced and how they overcame/did not overcome them, what skills and competencies enabled them, in both teachers and students, not only to adapt to all changes, but also to experience success even in such a critical situation. Research has also shown what changes in communication have been relevant and have led to easier transitions and greater success at different stages of study. It also reaffirmed the importance of information in communication, in particular its quantity, accuracy, relevance to specific decisions and so on. These studies and the conclusions drawn from them and the links found would be presented at the article

Keywords: *Communication, information, communication in education, self-directed learning competencies, distance learning.*

1. Introduction

Communication is one of the most important activities in all processes. Education, also higher education, is not exception. Because communication in education always is purposeful, one of the most important goals here is to achieve relevant learning outcomes. On the other hand, communication in education has all the characteristics of any type of communication, e.g. own style, strategies, and tactics of communication between teachers and students or only between teachers or only between students, as well as problems, challenges and crises. The latter, according to I. Mitroff and G. Anagnos (2001), is an event that has or may have a significant impact on the entire organization, its image, reputation, and maybe even on its further development and existence. And if any crisis in the organization is also accompanied by communication problems, the crisis will be double. According to F. Frandsen and V. Johansen (2011), a double crisis is a crisis when the primary crisis is accompanied by a communication crisis, which clearly shows that the organization is unable to manage communication processes, which should not cause or complicate the primary crisis that has already arisen, but rather on the contrary, to help and contribute to the initial - primary - crisis management.

2. Research problem

We would like to note that communication, including internal communication, as a research topic, is one of the most popular and relevant topics in social research. Lithuanian (Šliburytė, 2004; Tamutienė, 2010; Virbalienė, 2011; Puodžiūnas, 2013) and foreign scientists (Smith, & Mounter, 2008; White et al., 2010; Attharangsun, & Ussahawanitchakit, 2010; Linke, & Zerfass, 2011) in this field studied communication in various aspects, but there is still a great lack of research, especially in Lithuania, analyzing internal communication in the educational process. That is, to what extent the general principles of internal communication are suitable for this communication, how it changes

depending on the participants in the communication process, their characteristics, such as age, level of preparation, cultural characteristics, available experience, etc. There is also a great lack of research evaluating the impact of the quality of communication processes on overall success and quality of the educational process. This field mostly deals with collaborative processes, but the latter also focus more on the psychological aspect than on communication or information management. It is like an extension of the research field, but on the other hand, the essence of the communication process disappears in that extension and it becomes very difficult to find objective variables that can ensure higher quality not only in the communication education process, but also in the education process itself. For all the reasons mentioned above, it is obvious that communication in the educational process during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in Lithuania, is a relevant topic, because in any case, it was a crisis situation, and the communication crisis, as we have already mentioned, could have deepened it even more. In addition, this topic has not yet received much attention from researchers.

3. Research aim and objectives

This article aims to analyse teacher-student communication in the process of distance teaching/learning in higher education institutions under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic and the global quarantine caused by it. Changes in communication due to changes in the entire educational process during the pandemic and quarantine, and even the communication crisis in this context, are very relevant not only for a better understanding of the processes that took place, but also for predicting future trends in organizing the educational process, as a large number of participants in the higher education system would like to continue distance learning.

It is worth noting that when analyzing the concept of communication in the scientific literature, there is no unambiguous definition of this concept - partly because communication is analyzed in different contexts, partly because of the complexity of the communication phenomenon itself. This article will be guided by J. Keyton's (2011) concept of communication, according to which communication is a process of information transfer and mutual understanding between individuals. In other words, if there was no common understanding after exchanging information, it can be said that there was no communication or, in other words, the main goal of communication was not achieved.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting transition to a universal distance learning process, appropriate changes were clearly needed. They were necessary simply because distance education has greatly reduced, and sometimes (sometimes only due to technical obstacles) completely eliminated non-verbal communication, which is very significant in the process of communication. According to some authors, as much as 93 percent of information is transmitted and received through non-verbal communication (Virtual and Classroom Learning in Higher Education: a Guide to Effective Online Teaching, 2021).

It is clear that maintaining traditional teacher-student/student-teacher communication styles, strategies and tactics has been quite difficult due to all the changes that have occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the transition from almost full face-to-face to distance education, and more specifically distance learning. For the reasons already mentioned, the changes in teacher-student communication after the start of the first quarantine (in the spring of 2020) can be called a communication crisis. The teachers not only tried to maintain the traditional structure, timetable and programs of all courses and subjects. Nor did they change the style of communication with students. That is why the organization of studies during the first quarantine can even be referred to as a double crisis (Frandsen, & Johansen, 2011). The main reason for this double crisis was actually not the lack of didactic competences that are so necessary for online learning or distance learning, but the lack of changes in the process of communication. This is very clearly confirmed by the analysis of the survey conducted in June 2020.

On the other hand, during the second quarantine (from November 2020 to June 2021) or even before this period, certain changes have already been made. It is interesting that most of the changes were made in the area of communication - oral and written communication, synchronous and asynchronous, communication between all participants in the educational process. Most important in this area were changes in communication between teachers and students.

The analysis of educational innovation and communication strategy and tactical transformations presented and analyzed in the article is based on the results of a survey in June, 2021. The analysis of the results not only enabled to understand what was done, but also what should be done in future distance education, especially in order to avoid communication crises or minimize their consequences for distance education and learning.

4. Methodology of investigation

In order to find out how the academic community of Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija overcame the challenges of organizing the educational process and the resulting changes in communication, a study was conducted. The survey was conducted in June, 2020 (i.e. after the first general quarantine) and in June, 2021 (i.e. after the second, which lasted more than 3 times longer as the first). 94 full-time and 76 full-time social science students and 38 teachers working with full-time and part-time students participated in the survey.

From this qualitative and quantitative research became clear: how students and teachers assessed the quality of distance learning, what challenges they faced, how they overcame/did not overcome them, what abilities and competencies enabled them, i.e. both teachers and students, not only to adapt to all the changes, but also to experience success even in such a critical situation.

Research has also shown which changes in communication were relevant and led to an easier transition and greater success at various stages of studies. It also confirmed once again how important information is in communication, especially its quantity, accuracy, relevance for making specific decisions, etc.

5. Analysis of an empirical study

First of all, it was aimed to find out how the students managed to work remotely (see Table 1).

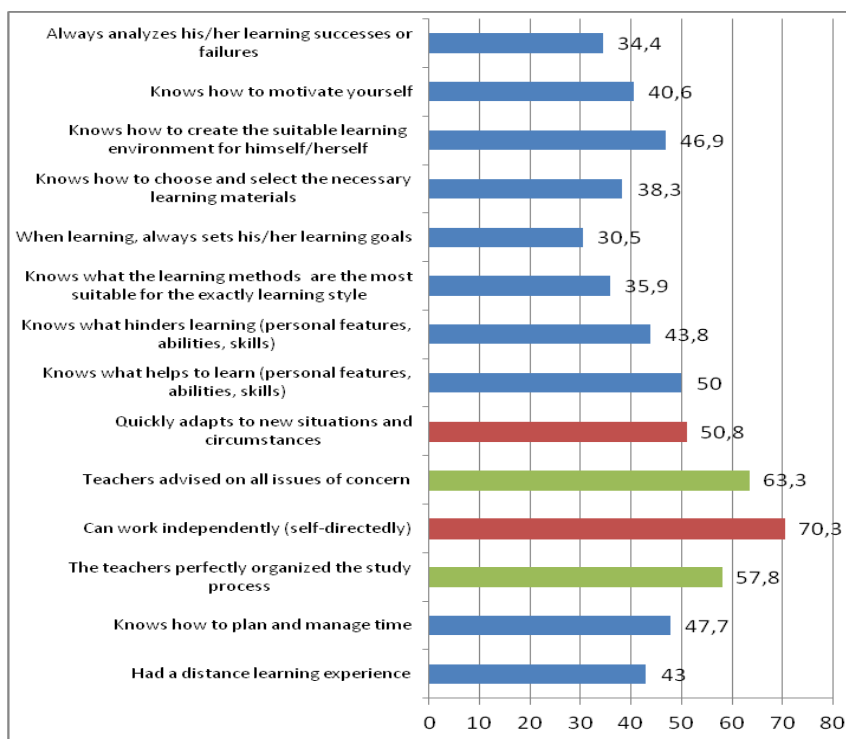
Table 1. Respondents' opinion about success/failure in distance learning.

Respondents' opinion about success/failure in distance learning	Percentages
Very successfully	22,6
Even better than in the auditorium	32,8
As well as by contact	18,2
It didn't go well in the beginning, but after that everything was fine	19,7
It didn't work out	6,7

As we can see, the vast majority of students did well enough to study remotely or the problems that arose were overcome and it became easier for them to study already at the end of the semester (we are talking about the first quarantine in 2020). And only 6.7% said that they were not successful in distance learning during the entire period of study.

An analysis of the reasons for success in distance learning is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Reasons for success in distance learning.



Obviously, the guarantors of success are twofold. On the one hand, it is the qualitative work of teachers, organizing the study process and helping students to solve all the problems that arise. On the other hand, the ability of students to work independently, or rather, self-directed, proved to be the most effective. Like adaptability, i.e. the ability to quickly adapt to changing environmental or life conditions, situations. In anticipation, it can be said that the latter skills are relevant not only during a pandemic or quarantine. Employers in almost all fields identify these abilities as very relevant today and even more relevant in the future.

This analysis of student experiences showed that students who had self-directed learning skills did better and, conversely, those who did not were more likely to fail or need more effort to overcome setbacks.

Table 2. Changes in the didactic system, educational paradigm.

Changes in the didactic system	Percentages
Had to change the criteria for assignments' evaluation	2,6
Looked for the new ways to get feedback	71,1
Gave more active, engaging, practical implementation demanding tasks	50,0
Renewed the presentations involving more verbal information in them	34,2
More counselling before mid-term exams and final exams	65,8
More detailed description of practical assignments	52,6
Changes in the content and methodics of mid-term and final exams	50,0
Used completely different study methods than those in contact classes	63,2

The biggest changes were in getting feedback. This is natural, because when working remotely, especially during the first quarantine, when students were very afraid to turn on the cameras during remote conferences, the teacher lost the opportunity to receive feedback from non-verbal language. For this reason, it was necessary to find reliable and informative methods that were mainly based on verbal communication.

Changes in communication are also related to other changes mentioned by the teachers, such as, for example, not only the quantity of consultations, but also their quality, new ways and methods of counselling, etc. As well as finding and mastering methods of organizing studies other than working in a contact manner.

Those that have not been successfully overcome are also more or less related to communication, more specifically to the quality of communication. For example, the problems related to the increased personalization of the study process, as it turned out later, actually led to the fact that the communication process between the teacher and the student was not efficient enough. Even the basic principles of organizing the communication process were not observed, such as, for example, the duration of communication, time, volume of information, etc. The same can be said about other challenges mentioned by the teachers, such as the intensity of the study process or significantly increased workload. When teachers were asked to explain these statements in detail, to provide specific examples and situations, they usually identified communication problems: too long consultation, the need to explain tasks in detail (usually in writing) to each student or write comments. Practical works to be corrected. Thus, a more detailed analysis of the situation only once again confirmed the importance of communication in the educational process and the need to change that communication in order for the process to be of high quality and with optimal time and effort.

It is obvious that all those changes, which led to the success of the study process, were actually not purely educational, but more communicative. This reaffirmed the idea of how relevant communication is in an organization, especially in a situation of change. And that effective communication creates the basis for success in overcoming challenges or in general escaping from a crisis in the organization.

6. Conclusions

- The analysis of the results not only made it possible to understand what was done, but also what should be done in the future in distance education in order to avoid communication crises or reduce their consequences during distance education and learning.
- The conclusions and recommendations presented here could be interesting and useful for improving future teaching and learning and not only by distance learning, and not only because of the new experience in organizing studies in the Covid-19 situation, but also because there is not enough attention paid to communication processes in education and its importance to its success.

- The study showed that students who had and had self-directed learning competencies were more likely to experience success than others. The same goes for teachers - having self-directed teaching/learning competences, they overcome various challenges more easily than others.

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