

"Marketing and education: directions of distance learning development"

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MARKETING AND EDUCATION: DIRECTIONS OF DISTANCE LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions to urgently introduce distance learning (DL), which has resulted in an unprecedented experiment in the sphere of higher education in Ukraine that requires scientific analysis. The aim of the work was to identify the possible potential directions of DL development in institutions of higher education as a result of marketing research of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of students with DL. The survey method was used in the study. The results of marketing research (an online survey of students) (Kharkiv, 2020, n = 316) allowed the authors to identify the factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of students with DL. Students considered the most important factors of satisfaction with DL as follows: development of competencies, self-organization, discipline, self-motivation, responsibility, taking an active position as participants of the educational process, comfort. Students expect that lectures secure improvement of teacher-student communication process; flexibility of educational approaches; use of interactive tools and constant change of activities to maintain the attention, interest, concentration of students on studying process. The latter will maximize students' involvement in activities during training; improvement of digital competencies. The students' expectations are: flexibility of the DL platforms compared to full-time in-person education; creation of the "map" of the educational process in a distance mode.

It is noted that the results of marketing research (the online survey) demonstrated the factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of students with DL. This information was considered as the arguments for identifying the possible potential directions of DL development in higher education institutions.

Keywords

marketing, education, directions of DL development, online surveys, satisfaction of students with DL

JEL Classification

M13, I21

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МАРКЕТИНГ І ОСВІТА: НАПРЯМИ РОЗВИТКУ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

Анотація

Пандемія COVID-19 змусила заклади освіти терміново запровадити дистанційне навчання (ДН), що спричинило безпрецедентний експеримент у сфері вищої освіти в Україні, який потребує наукового аналізу. Мета роботи - визначити можливі потенційні напрями розвитку дистанційного навчання у вищих навчальних закладах як результат маркетингового дослідження задоволеності/незадоволеності студентів ДН. Для досягнення зазначеної мети був використаний метод опитування. Результати маркетингового дослідження (онлайн-опитування студентів) (Харків, 2020, n = 316) дозволили авторам ідентифікувати фактори задоволеності та незадоволеності студентів ДН. Студенти вважають найважливішими факторами задоволеності ДН: розвиток компетентностей, самоорганізацію, дисциплінованість, самомотивацію, відповідальність, формування активної позиції як учасників навчального процесу, комфорт. Студенти очікують, що викладачі забезпечать поліпшення процесу комунікації викладач-студент; гнучкість освітніх підходів; використання інтерактивних інструментів та постійну зміну діяльності для підтримки уваги, інтересу, концентрації студентів на навчальному процесі. Останнє максимізує залучення студентів до діяльності під час навчання; вдосконалення цифрових компетентностей. Від навчальних закладів студенти очікують: гнучкість платформ ДН у порівнянні з денною формою навчання; створення "карти" навчального процесу у дистанційному режимі.

Зазначається, що результати маркетингового дослідження (онлайн опитування) продемонстрували фактори задоволеності та незадоволеності студентів ДН. Отримані дані розглядалися як аргументи для визначення можливих потенційних напрямів розвитку ДН у вищих навчальних закладах.

Ключові слова маркетинг, освіта, напрями розвитку ДН, онлайн опитування, задоволеність студентів ДН
Класифікація JEL M13, I21

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions to urgently introduce distance learning (DL), which resulted in an unprecedented experiment in the sphere of education in Ukraine that requires scientific analysis by economists, sociologists, psychologists and IT professionals. Failure or success of distance learning was determined by the level of readiness of: 1) the educational institutions: (for example, the availability of an online platform for organization of DL), 2) teachers (competence in organizing the DL process and readiness for change), 3) students (motivation and technical capability to study at home / in the dormitory), 4) a number of other external (technical, economic) and internal (psychological, social) factors. Marketing research in higher education allow us to have information about the problems of participants of educational process. Marketing interaction paradigm presupposes active participants of educational process. These are students, teachers and institutions of higher education. Such activity of participants coincides with the concept of relationship marketing. Relations of the participants of educational process are oriented to support long term activity. An analysis of DL in institutions of higher education and its assessment by teachers and students allow us to see the problems of DL and identify areas of growth in the quality of DL.

Students of institutions of higher education are the ultimate beneficiaries, recipients of educational services. This fact determines the urgency of the necessity to study the factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of students with distance learning (DL), understanding the factors influencing satisfaction and dissatisfaction of students with DL.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several terms used in modern scientific discourse to define new forms of learning: e-Learning, on-line learning, and distance learning. Distance learning is some form of instruction which occurs between two parties (a learner and an instructor), it is held at different times and/or places, and uses varying forms of instructional materials.

According to Moore, Dickson-Deane, Galyen (2011) e-Learning is defined as strictly being accessible, using technological tools that are either web-based, web-distributed, or web-capable forms e-resources: applications, programs, objects, websites, etc. Online learning is described by those authors as an access to learning experiences via the use of some technology. On-line learning is identified as a more recent version of distance learning which improves access to educational opportunities for learners and is described as both nontraditional and disenfranchised. Other authors discuss not only the accessibility of online learning but also its connectivity, flexibility and ability to promote varied interactions.

Thus, the most common term is DL, as it includes both e-Learning, online learning, which in turn should be used to focus on web-based tools (e-Learning), or to expand access to learning (online learning). To study the features of DL, the relationship marketing paradigm seems to be promising, which allows us to consider education as a service in a competitive environment and opens opportunities for marketing research. This contributes to the quality of education in order to improve and develop the educational product, create a unique trade proposition, use a human-oriented approach: building a learning strategy based on the needs and interests of consumers and participants in the educational process.

A series of scientific papers in the field of marketing education demonstrates the main trends in this area: the work of Ivy (2008) on the study of education in an aggressive competitive environment, the work of Granitz, Greene (2003) on e-commerce tools and e-marketing strategies in education, the work of Rippé et al. (2021) explore the socio-psychological consequences of COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

The work of Smørvik and Vespestad (2020) has marketing focus on education, in which the authors study values in a teaching-learning context, which, in turn, allows them to consider distance learning through the prism of the needs, interests and values of all participants of the learning process: students, teachers, educational institutions. In our opinion, human-oriented character of education is the basis for its development.

The relationship between students, teachers and universities has been the subject of analysis by Rayburn, Anderson, Sierra (2020), who were able to identify factors of shared responsibility for continuity of learning on the basis of the survey.

The article of Camilleri (2020) examines the marketing environment of today's higher education and raises the problems of autonomy of educational institutions, student-centered education, updates integrated marketing communications and makes emphasis on the fact that it is the marketing efforts of educational institutions that allow them to develop and interact with stakeholders.

Hall (2020) when studying how COVID-19 affects the future of education management notes that many business schools have responded quickly to COVID-19 by increasing their online presence as a temporary measure in the short term. Some business schools, in order to remain competitive in a fairly dense market, offer online programs at prices 50 percent lower than their traditional programs. In addition, in order to facilitate the rapid transition to distance learning, many business schools have turned to the online software development community, whose popularity is now gaining momentum. At the same time, as Hall (2020) points out, job performance and financial processes are complicated by the growing disparity between the business community and the performance of many business schools. After all, today employers are looking for graduates who can quickly adapt to the unstable conditions of society, aimed at solving problems, as well as those who can skillfully operate on the Internet.

Researchers Brammer, Clark (2020) in their article on COVID-19 and education management, note that COVID-19 spreading in January and February 2020, had its influence on universities and business schools and affected the academic year. The most vulnerable stakeholders were students, and it was their interests that became the first focus of business schools in the development and implementation of relevant activities.

Open universities of distance education have been established in Europe, i.e., a group of educational institutions that implement distance learning programs. Methods of such training include the use of new information technologies, which include satellite television, computer networks, multimedia, etc.

Among the world's leading educational institutions, such as the National University of Technology (USA), Shanghai University (PRC), relatively new distance education and self-education institutions such as TV universities, tutoring centers (multimedia learning), and information centers (Internet learning) have been established and gained popularity (2017).

The emergence of distance education is not accidental, it is a natural stage of development and adaptation of education to modern conditions. All over the world, distance education exists and occupies its socially significant place in the field of education. Distance learning is acquiring particular importance in a COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that before the pandemic period, distance learning in Ukraine was considered as an alternative to extramural form of study and tuition fees were at the level of extramural form of study. But during the coronavirus pandemic, intramural students are also at the distance form of education. Tuition is not reduced, which causes student dissatisfaction.

Ukrainian researchers Berezhna, Prokopenko (2020) note that COVID-19 encourages institutions of higher education in Ukraine to implement innovative solutions in a relatively short period of time and introduce distance learning using various web servers, platforms, resources and social networks. Issues of training foreign students

abroad during the crisis have become particularly acute. At the same time, Berezhna and Prokopenko (2020) note that the large-scale economic consequences of COVID-19 have led to a significant number of students experiencing difficult financial times, including foreign students who are stuck in the country throughout the pandemic. Research and teaching staff have also undergone significant changes as a result of COVID-19, as the pandemic has necessitated the application of the largest and fastest transformation of pedagogical activities and methods of assessing student knowledge that has ever been observed in modern universities. This has increased the workload on research and teaching staff and requires them to join forces, including software training and joint practical activity.

Distance learning provides students with new opportunities of higher education: expanding access to educational services due to digital platforms and interactive instruments; improvement of competencies: responsibility, time management, creativity, adaptability; multichannel technologies, teacher - student communication.

2. AIMS

The aim of the article is to identify the possible potential directions of distance learning development in institutions of higher education as a result of marketing research of satisfaction, dissatisfaction of students with DL. To achieve the aim it was necessary to solve the following tasks: 1) to analyze the peculiarities of the perception of DL by students, 2) to study the problems of students in the process of adaptation to DL; 3) to outline potential competencies that will be in demand in the digital future; 4) to identify the perspective directions of DL development in modern academic space.

3. METHODS

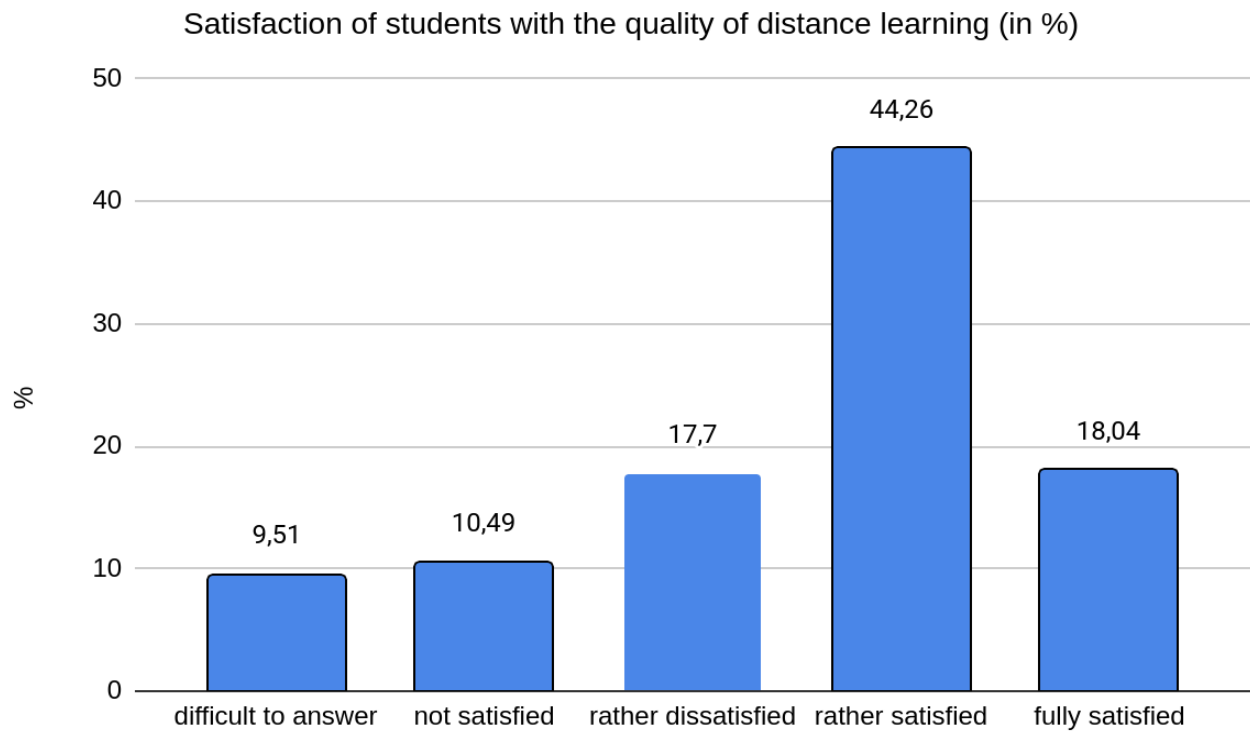
The online survey method with the Google Forms service was used. 316 students of Kharkiv institutions of higher education were interviewed during May-October 2020.

4. RESULTS

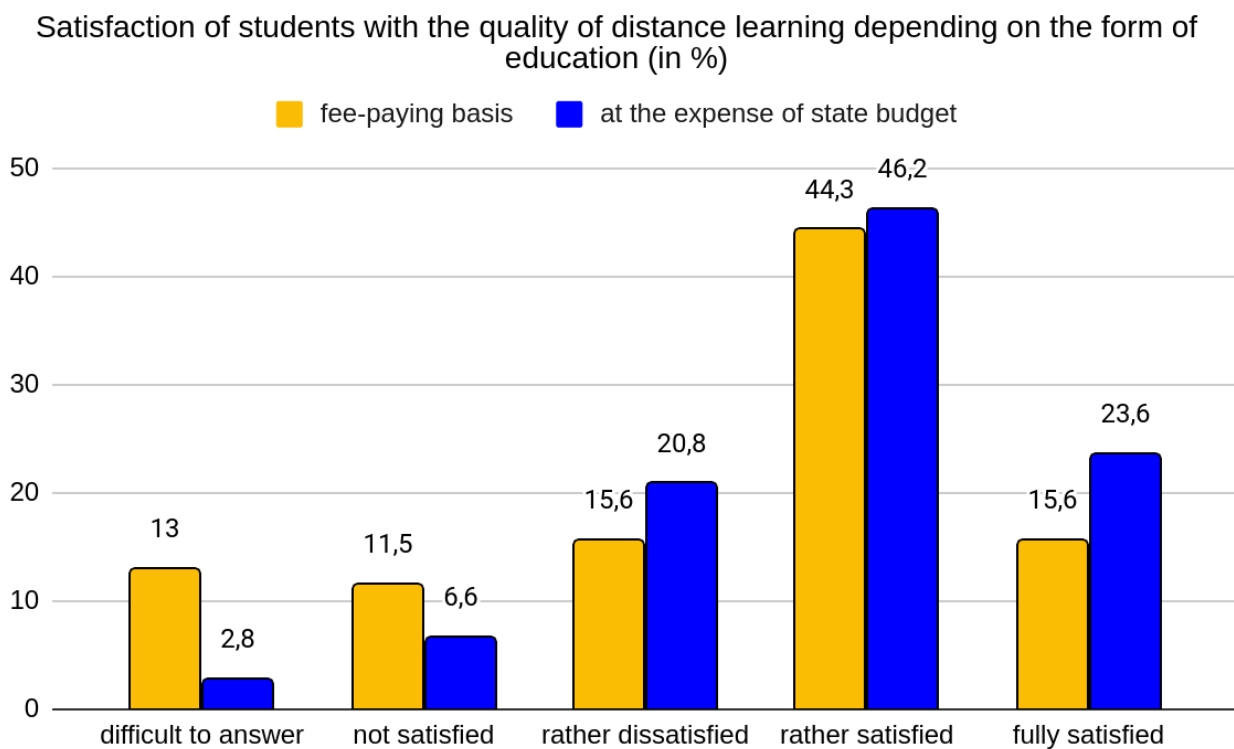
According to the results of the online survey of students (Kharkiv, $n = 316$ May-October 2020, students of universities were interviewed) the following answers were obtained to questions about satisfaction with the quality of distance learning. 10.49% - dissatisfied with the quality of distance learning, 17.7% more dissatisfied than satisfied, 44.26% more satisfied than dissatisfied, 18.03% - satisfied with the quality of distance learning, 9.5% of students find it difficult to answer questions (see Figure 1). That is, the majority of students (62.29%) are satisfied or rather satisfied with the quality of distance learning.

As a result of looking for a correlation between students' satisfaction with distance learning and other studied characteristics, it was found that there were no correlations with such features as age, course of study. At the same time, significant statistical differences were found depending on the form of education (students studying on a fee-paying basis, students studying at the expense of state budget). Thus, students studying on a fee-paying basis are less satisfied with distance learning compared to students studying at the expense of the state budget (see Figure 2). Among students studying on a fee-paying basis, 15.6% of students are satisfied with the quality of distance learning, 44.3% – rather satisfied, 15.6% – rather dissatisfied, 11.5% – dissatisfied with the quality of distance learning, another 13% of students chose the answer “difficult to answer”, which indirectly indicates dissatisfied students who are not ready to openly express their dissatisfaction.

Among students studying at the expense of state budget 23.6% of students are satisfied with the quality of distance learning, 46.2% – rather satisfied, 20.8% – rather dissatisfied, 6.6% – dissatisfied with the quality of distance learning, 2.8% of students chose the answer “difficult to answer”.



Source: Compiled by the authors on the results of survey of students.

Figure 1. Satisfaction of students with the quality of distance learning (in %)

Source: Compiled by the authors on the results of survey of students.

Figure 2. Satisfaction of students with the quality of distance learning depending on the form of education (in %)

It is clear that the cost of in-person learning and distance learning should be different. At the same time, students paid the full cost of in-person learning, in fact receiving educational services according to distance type of learning, which affected their greater dissatisfaction with distance learning compared to students studying at the expense of state budget.

In addition, students had the opportunity to explain their answer to the question concerning the satisfaction with the quality of distance learning in the open question. Answers were received that allow us to identify factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of students with distance learning.

Most factors of satisfaction / dissatisfaction are the same, i.e., in fact, it is the presence / absence of certain characteristics that determine the degree of students satisfaction.

Factors of satisfaction with distance learning include (quotes from students' answers to the open question are given in quotation marks):

1. Convenience, comfort, accessibility:

"Everything is very convenient, especially meetings in Zoom", "convenient", "there is time for own needs", "I am more comfortable", "the quality of knowledge is at the same level as with in-person learning", "everything is accessible and a lot of material", "psychological comfort, this is a significant advantage", "the possibility to combine things that take a lot of time".

2. Saving time on commuting:

"No time is spent to get to the place of study", "it is not possible to watch lectures another time, but it is very convenient to be able to do everything at a distance, it saves time", "no need to go anywhere, no one is distracting".

3. Security:

"Distance learning helps not to put myself and others at risk", "It's more convenient and comfortable for me to study at home than to go to university", "I'm less likely to get infected and infect others".

4. Good organization of the educational process:

"The work was fast and of high quality", "classes are on schedule, teachers are doing their job, training continues".

5. Simplicity, ease of learning:

"I was able to prepare fully, it was easier" "for me, personally, distance learning is much easier, but less effective".

6. Acquisition of material:

"I have mastered the material well", "I have more time to study the material remotely", "convenient format, you can return to the materials at any time, at any speed", "improved my grades during distance learning, because I became more focused on tasks".

7. Combination of study and work; study and recreation:

"The opportunity to study without leaving the main place of work", "I had the opportunity to study and work at the same time", "there is time for work, study, leisure and time for family".

8. Communication with the teacher (clarity of tasks, assessment, efficiency):

"Satisfied with the quality of distance learning, because teachers always clearly explained the material and arranged lectures, practical classes, which gave the opportunity to ask questions in person".

Factors of dissatisfaction with distance learning included:

1. Variety of approaches to the organization of training:

"In my opinion, everything is a bit unorganized", "there was a lack of consistency, structure, practical training", "we need a clear system of organization of the educational process, as different platforms are offered.

2. Insufficient communication with the teacher:

“Sometimes there is a lack of person to person communication with the teacher”, “sometimes the internet is bad”.

3. Increased work load, fatigue, lack of concentration, misunderstanding of the process, discomfort, inconvenience:

“Learning online is certainly very convenient, but there is even more fatigue than with offline classes”, “difficult to understand the material, many tasks for self-study”, “the work load was greater than within the university”, “difficult to concentrate”, “there is discomfort, which is manifested in the working moments”.

4. Problems with acquisition of material:

“During distance learning it is not possible to master the material completely”, “there are many questions that are difficult to get answered quickly”, “distance learning does not provide complete and high-quality information”.

5. Lack of motivation:

“There is no desire and motivation to perform tasks at home”, “while at home you start to be very lazy”, “there are problems with self-organization, the desire to learn disappears”, “it is difficult to adjust to learning, to new information”.

6. Price / quality mismatch:

“I went to university for in-person learning, not the distance one”.

7. Technical problems (unstable internet connection, incorrect operation of the university online platform, lack of equipment):

“Failed to get better results due to internet connection problems”, “Poor internet quality, which causes some difficulties”.

8. Unclear criteria for assessing students' knowledge:

“The assessment criteria were not always clear”.

The considered factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with distance learning give the chance to single out the directions of its development.

Students expect from educational institutions: 1) flexibility of distance learning payment system in comparison with in-person education; 2) creation of the clearest and simplest for both students and teachers “map” of the educational process in the distance mode (step-by-step instructions for the organization of training, transparent assessment system, clear from the beginning assessment criteria); providing access to all materials and tasks in an asynchronous mode (for this, most universities use the Moodle platform); 3) revision of work load norms in the direction of reduction, first of all, for synchronous distance learning in order to avoid work overload, fatigue, discomfort for both students and teachers.

Students expect that teachers secure: 4) improvement of the teacher-student communication process (use of several communication channels, prompt feedback, consultation meetings / separate allocated time for questions / answers); 5) flexibility of educational approaches that take into account the diversity of students in terms of their technical capabilities, psychological peculiarities, social conditions and family and domestic circumstances; 6) the use of interactive tools and continuous change of forms of activity to hold the attention, interest, concentration of students, maximum involvement of students in learning (both lecture and seminar learning, practical, laboratory work), the use of various forms of doing tasks (mandatory group work); 7) increase of digital competencies (mastery of tools, settings and work with various services and platforms).

Students considered the most important factors of satisfaction are: 8) development of competencies, self-organization, discipline, self-motivation, responsibility; 9) formation of an active position: not only as a consumer of education, but also as a participant of the educational process (provides for inclusion, involvement during synchronous classes, initiation of communication); 10) the ability to find compromise solutions for all participants of the learning process (understanding that even a well-tuned system fails, recognition and acceptance of the possibility of errors, alternatives, taking into account technical problems, including absence from classes).

Controversial is the proposal of students, which was voiced in the process of answering an open question about the unification of tools, platforms and approaches in the learning process. On the one hand, indeed, within an educational institution, as a rule, there is a single platform that provides learning in asynchronous mode. On the other hand, requiring teachers to use common applications and tools to organize synchronous learning is a limitation of professional activity. Because each teacher should be able to independently decide which applications, tools, methods of working with students meet the objectives and contribute to the formation of the necessary competencies in the discipline.

One of the tasks of the work was to study the problems of students to adapt to digital learning and identify potential competencies that will be in demand in the future.

The number of students dissatisfied / partially dissatisfied with the quality of DL indirectly reflects the number of students who have difficulty of adapting to digital learning. The consequences of the low level of adaptive abilities were work overload, fatigue, lack of concentration, lack of motivation, misunderstanding of the process, discomfort, inconvenience, which were pointed out by students.

According to Parsons, adaptation is one of the four functional requirements that social systems must meet in order to survive: that is, during COVID-19, education had a choice to adapt or cease its activities. At the individual level, adaptability is a soft skill that means being able to rapidly learn new skills and behaviors in response to changing circumstances. According to the World Economic Forum (2019), adaptability is included in the TOP-5 soft skills companies need in 2019. We can predict that in the context of the 2020-2021 pandemic, the importance of adaptability will increase. In addition to Adaptability, TOP-5 needed soft skills included Creativity, Persuasion, Collaboration and Time Management.

Other soft skills also influenced the process of adaptation to rapid social change. It was Time Management that helped to prevent work overload and fatigue: students noted that a good tool to organize their studies at home was to create a daily routine in which there was a place not only for learning, but also for recreation, sports and communication with friends, even work. We can consider Adaptability as a basis for the development of the dimension of creativity -flexibility, which is the ability to produce a variety of responses.

In general, the level of satisfaction with distance learning indicates the high adaptability of most students and demonstrates a high level of digital readiness. At the same time, the question of students' competencies that will be in demand in the future remains relevant. In the conditions of distance learning such competences (soft-skills) as ability to adapt to the new environment, sociability, self-motivation, time management, emotional intelligence and creativity-flexibility become especially relevant.

The data obtained during the study correlate with the data of other surveys in Ukrainian universities. Thus, the survey of the quality of distance learning in the sphere of educational services at Lviv University of Trade and Economics (2020) also demonstrates mostly satisfaction of students with distance learning. The advantages of DL according to this survey (2020) included: individualization of training, comprehensive acquaintance with the entire course of the discipline, the ability to continue in time mastering the material. The shortcomings of distance learning have also been studied, which include: insufficient provision of educational content on the subject, excessive workload of the student, lack of communication with classmates, insufficient personal contact with the teacher. However, since the data about the advantages and disadvantages of training were obtained as a result of closed questions (ie with answer options). This suggests that other factors that were not included in the questionnaire and may affect the satisfaction / dissatisfaction of students with DL, which justifies the need of further study

of this problem. Similar features of building tools and conducting a survey of students are presented in other studies, such as “Distance Learning Through the Eyes of Students: Results of an Online Survey” of the University of KROK (2020).

It should be mentioned that the obtained data also correlate with the data of international studies of Rayburn, Anderson, Sierra (2020). Thus, students identify university, professor, and personal actions and circumstances that contribute to positive educational experiences during global pandemic crisis: universities establish policies, procedures, and systems that facilitate a shared responsibility-grounded continuous learning experience. As the frontline of the organization, professors are charged with implementing such guidelines. Lastly, students must be proactive and accountable to ensure their educational success. However, it is clear that surveys in other countries reflect the national characteristics of both educational institutions and cultural policies, which may differ in the Ukrainian context.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the article further develops the issue of determining the promising areas of development of DL, which allowed us to identify the possible potential directions of distance learning development in institutions of higher education as a result of marketing research of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction of students with DL. The obtained results can be used by speakers of trainings, master-classes, web-seminars, as well as by teachers and managers of institutions of higher education.

Further research may be focused on the ways of reducing the gap between existing competencies and desirable student competencies which are in demand in contemporary educational activity and labor market. It may be devoted to the role of distance learning which becomes an important part of contemporary, global, technological world, the aim of which is expanding access to the possibilities for education and professional development of young people.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

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