

DIGITALIZATION OF EDUCATION: A STEP INTO THE FUTURE

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In 2020 the coronavirus pandemic has swept all over the world, changing the personal and professional lives of millions of people, including students, educators, and education researchers. As a result, at all levels of education instructors, institution leaders and policy makers are facing an unprecedented challenge, trying to ensure that high quality teaching and learning continues under rapidly changing and unpredictable conditions. The same is true about students and lecturers who were forced to change the form of their communication from offline to online.

This work is devoted to the problem of digitalization of education during the pandemic and finding new effective ways of communication.

The relevance of this topic is quite obvious, since many countries instituted temporal closures of higher education institutions in March 2020 and had to adopt other alternative methods and technologies of teaching. [1]

According to [UNESCO \(2020a\)](#), schools and higher education institutions were closed in 178 countries, affecting roughly 1.3 billion learners worldwide. As a consequence, students have been facing a fundamentally altered situation not only with respect to their studies but also with their lives as a whole. So, in this situation online learning or e-learning became an urgent necessity, rather than an option.

We can't but mention that the pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of education forcing school teachers and university lecturers to learn how to use different e-learning platforms at an accelerated pace. In turn, online platforms like Google innovated to meet this new demand, quickly incorporating functions such as video-conferencing to their Classrooms service. [2]

During the pandemic in our country as well as abroad many universities have started using such platforms as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Moodle, Google Accounts and others. In this paper we would like to pay a special attention to the Microsoft Teams program, which is successfully implemented by many Belarusian universities, including Polesky State University.

Teams is Microsoft's online service for collaboration and remote work. This digital product entered the market in early 2017, and by the end of 2019, the total number of Microsoft Teams users exceeded 20 million people. [3]

The platform provides users with great opportunities for real-time communication. Consider the main functions and advantages of this program.

1. *Creation of groups and channels.* Users can create groups with communication channels available to all members of the group and inaccessible outside the group.

2. *Videoconferencing.* The program allows you not only to make personal audio and video calls, chat, but also to conduct full-fledged video conferences with up to 300 people and up to 24 hours.

3. *Screen sharing.* The screen sharing function allows participants to share a huge number of files of various types with the output of information on a common screen. For example, while giving a lecture, the teacher can simultaneously demonstrate a presentation, graphs, tables.

During practical classes, especially when learning foreign languages, you can display pictures and photos to describe them, text documents with exercises, presentations, audio and video files, links to useful Internet resources, followed by a transition to the desired site.

4. *Creation of tests and tasks.* This feature allows the teacher to test students' knowledge without leaving the program. The test can be designed either for all members of a given group, or for individual users.

5. *Working with applications.* A huge number of applications are at the disposal of Microsoft Teams users. Extremely effective for developing writing skills, as well as for using the "brainstorming" method, is the Whiteboard application.

The interactive whiteboard functionality allows participants to collaborate on a single, endless whiteboard in real time, just as they would on a regular physical whiteboard.

Another popular platform used by many universities is Moodle. This platform allows students and lecturers to implement distance learning effectively. [4]

With the development of digitization and the emergence of new online platforms, our university decided to keep up with the innovations and took part in the exhibition of educational achievements.

On 17 February 2021, the final board of the Ministry of Education held an exhibition of achievements of the education system. Polesky State University presented the solution that had been implemented at the university as a part of the Digital University project.

The solution which is based on the Microsoft Teams software product is currently being developed at a very fast pace. In recent months it has acquired a number of new features, which undoubtedly enhance the possibilities of higher education. This product has extensive integration capabilities with various products: ServiceDesk Plus Cloud, Azure Boards, GitHub Enterprise, Google Analytics, Kahoot!

The Digital University project opens up unlimited possibilities for Polesky State University offering a number of advantages in both academic and research activities of the university. [5]

One should note that coronavirus acted as a time machine that transported us forward a couple of years, judging by the new digital habits that emerged and have already taken root. It is not only about online communication, but also about digital services, online shopping, and online entertainment.

Speaking of education, we can't help but touch on the subject of communication. Distance communication between student and teacher is becoming more and more popular. Digitalization has made learning more flexible and accessible to all those interested in learning. Various chat rooms, e-correspondence allow students ask questions and gets answers promptly. [6]

In conclusion we can say that digitalization has introduced a lot of positive changes into the educational process. Firstly, education has become much more accessible than before. Secondly, it has taught people to be self-reliant. One more advantage is the absence of paperwork. Digital education relieves people from piles of papers and books. A computer can hold all the textbooks and manuals and a tablet can replace workbooks. [7]

So, digitalization of education is definitely a "step into the future". Thanks to it we get greater possibilities not only for learning and teaching but also for communication.

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