

Remote Teaching at Russian Universities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT – Remote Teaching at Russian Universities during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The purpose of this article is to study the features of remote work of teachers of higher educational institutions in distance learning. For the study, we used the data of a sociological survey of teachers from 5 large universities in Russia. Based on the results of the study, recommendations were developed for improving the activities of a teacher working remotely. The conclusion concerns the limited value of the distance learning format for a university teacher and the expediency of its use as an addition to the traditional form of education. The research results contribute to the development of the theory and practice of distance employment.

Keywords: Remote Work. Distance Learning. Classroom Learning. Pandemic. Digital Education Technologies.

RESUMO – Ensino Remoto em Universidades Russas durante a Pandemia de COVID-19. O objetivo deste artigo é estudar as características do trabalho remoto de docentes universitários em ensino a distância. Foram utilizados dados de uma pesquisa sociológica com docentes de cinco grandes universidades da Rússia. A partir dos resultados do estudo, foram elaboradas recomendações para o aprimoramento do trabalho a distância dos docentes. Conclui-se sobre o valor limitado do formato de ensino a distância para o docente universitário e sobre a conveniência de utilizá-lo como complemento à forma tradicional de ensino. Os resultados da pesquisa contribuem para o desenvolvimento da teoria e prática do trabalho a distância.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho Remoto. Ensino a Distância. Aprendizagem em Sala de Aula. Pandemia. Tecnologias de Educação Digital.

Introduction

Higher education in Russia was one of the first spheres affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Following the lockdown announcement, all educational activities were transferred to the distance format. Teachers had to self-isolate, which meant they were to perform their professional activities from home by means of digital technologies. In 2019-2020, higher education in Russia underwent a large-scale transformation which affected 4 million students and 235 thousand teachers (Shtykhno, 2020). Besides changing the education format, this transformation also meant a new approach to teaching, to organising the learning process, and to the development of professional competencies. The academic staff of higher education institutions were not unanimous about these changes.

Rapid transition to remote teaching resulted in dramatic changes in the usual workflow: teachers had to master new educational technologies and adapt to new work routine. They had to organise remote interaction with students, which was also quite a challenge and not always a success.

The key characteristics of remote teaching at higher education institutions are listed in Chapter 49 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation (Labour Code, 2021). People working from home are considered to be employees who

- perform their duties outside the employer's premises (an office or any other place directly or indirectly belonging to the employer);
- use Internet to interact with the employer;
- have signed a remote work agreement.

The specifics of remote teaching at higher education institutions are determined by the nature of teachers' activities, as well as by local bylaws and regulations concerning the transition to remote work. At the same time, teachers' activities are fully regulated by the Labour Code of the Russian Federation.

The transition to remote work was a rather dramatic one. It has brought new trends to the field of education and caused heated discussion, since not everyone embraces remote teaching so eagerly. In May 2020, Institute of Social Analysis and Forecasting of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration conducted a survey in order to see what teachers think about distance learning. The respondents were asked to evaluate the quality and convenience of online teaching. 87.4% said they had less free time because of working remotely. 62.1% considered remote teaching inconvenient. 85% of teachers would prefer traditional classroom to remote teaching (Shamakhov, 2020).

By now, higher education institutions in Russia have gained wide experience of organising large-scale distance learning, which researchers consider to be a reaction to a long-term emergency situation (Orusova, 2020; Minaev et al., 2020; Shamakhov 2020). Parallel to

this, we observed the development of remote teaching. At the moment, this experience needs generalisation and critical evaluation.

Remote work did not, of course, appear because of COVID-19. It has existed for several decades now, and there are quite a number of papers detailing its advantages and disadvantages (Atkinson & Meager, 1986; Haddon & Brynin, 2005; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016; Wheatley, 2017). At the same time, the grave danger posed by the spread of COVID-19 added new features to the organisation of the remote working process. These features include rapid transition to a new format of work with all teachers having to work remotely; pervasive use of distance learning technologies; predominantly online teaching; social and psychological challenges caused by self-isolation and lockdown (Hodges, 2020). For this reason, even teachers who had successfully used elements of distance learning before, encountered certain difficulties when switching to large-scale remote teaching during the pandemic. Therefore, it is important to conduct further research into remote teaching and determine the features of this format of education characteristic for the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The existing papers on the problems of remote teaching faced by higher education institutions under the COVID-19 pandemic can be divided into 2 groups:

1. Papers that critically assess the ability of teachers working at higher education institutions to deliver education programmes online on a regular basis (Rice et al, 2020; Faize & Nawaz, 2020; Cutri & Mena, 2020; Tsygalov, 2020). The weak side of these studies is that rather than suggesting recommendations on the improvement of remote teaching, they focus on the general problems of distance learning faced by higher education institutions.

2. Papers that study the features of certain distance learning techniques and the specifics of distance learning with regard to certain groups of students and certain subjects (Fatani, 2020; Tyuleneva & Gorbachev, 2020; White, 2020). These studies lack a systematic approach to organising remote teaching at education institutions, which makes it problematic to apply the recommendations on the improvement of distance education suggested by the authors.

The literature review demonstrated that researchers are developing scientific approaches to the assessment of the specifics of remote teaching resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on the field of education. At the same time, there are a number of issues that have not been thoroughly studied yet, including a comprehensive study of the problems and the potential of remote teaching.

The above-mentioned factors determined the purpose, tasks, and the value of our study. The purpose of our research was to analyse the current issues and development tendencies of remote teaching at universities in Russia delivering their education programmes at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to do this, we accomplished the following tasks.

- To determine the specifics of remote teaching at Russian universities under the threat of the coronavirus infection.
- To analyse the record of remote teaching at Russian universities, determine the most problematic issues, and suggest solutions.
- To determine the prospects of remote teaching at Russian universities based on the experience gained during the pandemic.

Research methodology

The theoretical basis of our study were papers by Russian and foreign experts on organising remote learning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The empirical information was derived from the survey of 480 teachers from 5 leading Russian universities: Perm State University (PSU), Perm National Research Polytechnic University (PNRPU), Voronezh State University (VSU), Kursk Branch of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation (KBFU), and Southwest State University (SWSU). These universities are located in the regions which differ in their level of social and economic development, their demography, and some other parameters. During the survey, the teachers were suggested to fill in a questionnaire consisting of 13 questions and presented via Google-forms and Moodle e-learning system.

The survey was conducted in 4 stages.

1. Listing the target population. The target population included 480 teachers from Perm, Voronezh, and Kursk representing different universities. The margin error was 5%.
2. Determining the research instrument: listing the questions and possible answers to be included in the questionnaire.
3. Using the research instrument (questionnaire). The polls were conducted in January and February 2021, when the teachers were still working remotely.
4. Processing and analysing the obtained data. The results of the survey were processed with MS Excel by calculating the percentage ratio of each answer. In order to do this, we first calculated the frequency of the answers given by teachers from the target population.

The sociological study was used to assess the current state of remote teaching in five Russian universities included in the research, as well as to determine teachers' preferences with regard to remote work. We also applied critical thinking to determine the most problematic issues.

Based on the results of the analysis of the remote teaching process at five Russian universities, we developed 3 hypotheses.

1. Remote teaching on its own is of little help to university teachers.
2. A hybrid model, i.e. a combination of classroom and remote teaching, which formed during the quarantine, is likely to be used on a long-term basis.

3. Universities in Russia demonstrate practically the same approach to organising remote teaching.

Results

In our study, we determined the following characteristic features of remote teaching at Russian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic which affect the perception of the problems and prospects of remote work for university employees.

- Compulsory distance learning by means of information and communication technologies and digital content.
- Predominantly online classes held in accordance with the approved timetable using video conferencing software (Zoom.us, BBB, VKontakte video calls, etc.).
- “Anonymity” of the education process: the teacher does not see his/her students and their reaction and thus cannot say whether they comprehend the material.
- Since it is difficult to keep students’ attention during an online class, teachers resort to simpler and more interesting ways of presenting the material.
- Personalised learning models for students with special needs (temporary or permanent): students with disabilities, working students, students in difficult life situations, etc.
- Lack of a culture of informal communication between teachers and students, which is traditionally an important part of the education process influencing students’ motivation level.
- Lack of “live” discussion and a formal approach to teaching assuming that the information is presented according to a set plan.
- It is impossible to constantly monitor the work of students in different video conference rooms, and therefore to assess the contribution of each student.
- Gamification of the learning process aimed at better involvement of students. It requires the teacher to reconsider his/her professional identity.
- “Forced freedom” meaning that teachers have to make their own choice of the video conferencing software, the way to present the material, the assessment tools, the feedback channels, etc.
- Compulsory use of modern digital technologies.
- When planning the lesson, besides the volume and complexity of the material, teachers also have to take into account the specifics of digital communication: the time required to connect to a video conference, distribute students between rooms, read the chat, follow the links to certain digital content used in the class, etc.

- The duration and the quality of online classes largely depend on the characteristics of the electronic devices, the speed and stability of the Internet connection, and the digital literacy of the teacher.
- Predominant use of visual presentation aids and digital content with commentaries instead of live discussion.
- The need to change learning activities more often, since students get tired more quickly and stop paying attention.
- Issues with online self-presentation and protection of privacy (choice of clothes and workplace, using a special screen, etc.).
- Psychological and physiological discomfort caused by working too much with electronic devices.
- Lack of traditional communication with colleagues and students; predominantly digital communication.
- Preparation requires more time, since teachers have to learn to use information and communication technologies in the education process and convert study materials to the digital format.

The legal basis for the remote work of university teachers also differs. Their work is regulated by local bylaws adopted by higher education institutions (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Aspects of remote teaching during the pandemic regulated by local bylaws of higher education institutions

Aspect of remote teaching	Regulations
Transition to remote work	An addendum to the work agreement regarding temporary transition to remote work
Number of teachers working remotely	All the teachers who deliver their courses during the semester (academic term)
Courses to be taught online	All courses that are to be delivered in the semester (academic term) according to the curricula
Courses to be taught in the classroom	Certain workshops and practical classes that require laboratory equipment. This is possible at a later stage of the COVID-19 pandemic following a request from the teacher or a decision of the head of the institution
Timetable	Online classes are held according to the adopted timetable
Digital education platforms (tools)	Teachers choose an online platform themselves and put a link to this platform in the timetable. University administration may recommend using certain equipment, software, security measures, etc.
Monitoring	The monitoring is performed by the vice-rector for academic affairs, the academic board of the university, deans, heads of departments, and dean's offices
Students to be taught remotely	Bachelor's, master's, and specialist's degree students, postgraduate students, students of the presidential programme on training managers for enterprises of the national economy, and students of advanced training and retraining programmes
Technical support	Universities assign employees responsible for technical issues arising in the remote teaching process

Number of students in an online class	Equals the number of students in the group as at the date of the online class
Content and structure of online classes	In accordance with the teaching materials for the course
Assessment	In accordance with the teaching materials for the current and final assessments
Feedback	Students fill in a questionnaire about the teacher and send their answers via the local digital education platform. Students' opinion is taken into account when awarding bonuses to teachers according to the terms of the "effective contract".

Source: Original Survey.

The sociological survey showed us what university teachers think about working remotely. Most teachers (69%) believe that working remotely during the pandemic helped to reduce the risk of infection for them and their families. 37% felt quite comfortable about the transition to remote teaching, 48% experienced some difficulties, and 15% found remote work difficult and uncomfortable.

The respondents were also asked to assess the quality of distance education as compared to the traditional format. Most teachers (39%) think that the quality of education decreased insignificantly. 25% believe that it stayed the same, and 32% think it deteriorated a lot. Only 6% noted that the quality of education improved.

The key advantages of remote work named by the teachers from different universities are listed in Table 1. 93% say that remote work has certain advantages, the key ones being low risk of infection, saving of resources due to working from home, and flexibility of the education process due to the use of digital technologies. At the same time, 7% do not see any advantages in working from home.

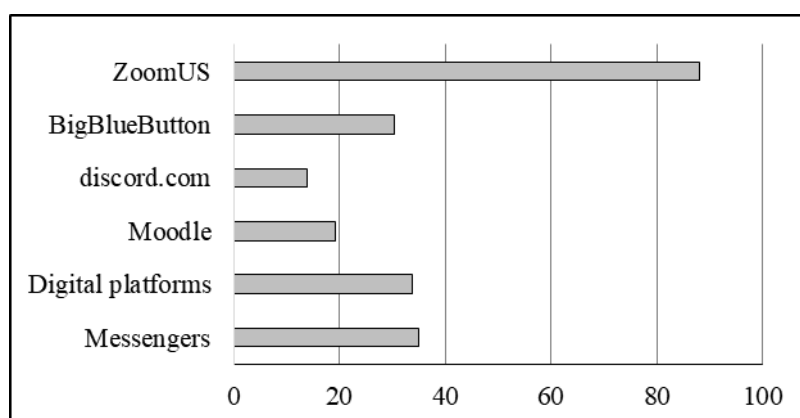
Table 1 – Advantages of remote work for teachers

Advantages	Number of respondents, %
Low risk of infection	68
Saving of resources (time, money)	58
Flexibility of the education process due to the use of digital technologies	54
More independence with regard to the teaching tools and means of communication	30
Comfortable environment	30
The possibility to combine work with housework	27
Homemade meals	26
A chance to make classes more interesting	19
A chance to replicate classes using video recording and converting the study materials into a digital format	13
No advantages	7

Source: The results of the survey conducted by the authors.

Teachers from different universities use various digital platforms in their work. The survey demonstrated that most teachers prefer Zoom.US. The next best options are social networks and BigBlueButton. Some teachers also use messengers (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.) and discord.com. The diagram of the most popular software (% of the total number of respondents) is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Software popularity among teachers



Source: The results of the survey conducted by the authors.

Teachers use various means of communication with students. Their preferences are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Means of communication teachers use in the distance learning process

Means of communication	Number of respondents, %
Video conferencing	80
E-mail	56
Online tests	55
Individual online consultations	49
A combination of methods: screen sharing, group chats, joint work on documents in Google Docs	49
Giving home assignments	44
Posting study materials online	39
Chats	34
Social networks and messengers	33
Project work	33
Webinars	27
Phone calls	13
Skype	13
Other	3

Source: The results of the survey conducted by the authors.

Table 2 shows that the most popular means of communication between teachers and students are video conferencing, e-mail, online testing, online consultations, home assignments, and their combinations.

The teachers' answers to the question "What do you think are the prospects of distance learning at higher education institutions?" varied greatly. 65% of respondents view distance learning as an additional tool that can be used together with offline learning (hybrid learning). 61% believe that distance learning can only be used in situations similar to the coronavirus pandemic. 21% think that distance learning can be a part of personalised curriculum for certain students. Only 12% say that distance learning can be effectively used as the main education format. These views determine the opinion of the teachers about the prospects of distance learning and remote work. Most teachers (65%) say that only a combination of online and offline learning can be effective, with traditional classroom learning being a compulsory part of the education process. 61% are willing to work entirely from home, but only for a limited period of time, for instance in emergency situations.

The survey also revealed the problems faced by the teachers because of working remotely. 43% of the teachers surveyed said they had issues with Internet connection, and 25% experienced problems with acquiring computers and software required for distance teaching. 33% mentioned increased fatigability and health issues. 61% missed face-to-face communication with students, and 31% missed communication with colleagues. 7% faced psychological challenges caused by remote teaching. 59% said it was difficult to assess students' knowledge, and 13% found it difficult to concentrate on work being at home.

The survey also included a question about the teacher workload. 23% said they spent the same time on preparation, giving feedback to home assignments, and other activities. 35% think that remote teaching requires a bit more time, and 42% believe that remote teaching takes significantly more time. 97% said that their salary stayed the same during the period of remote teaching. 2% said they were paid less. Only 1% were paid more when working remotely.

Table 3 – Requirements for teachers working remotely

Requirements	Number of respondents, %
Ability to adapt the study courses to the online format	78
Awareness of modern digital technologies	75
Ability to motivate and involve students in the distance learning process	68
Ability to maintain effective communication with the participants of the distance learning process	48
Ability to create digital content appealing to students	47
Creativity	45

Ability to work with groups of students	31
Stress resistance	29
Awareness of the basic principles of social and psychological adaptation of students to distance learning	25
Ability to work with individual students	23

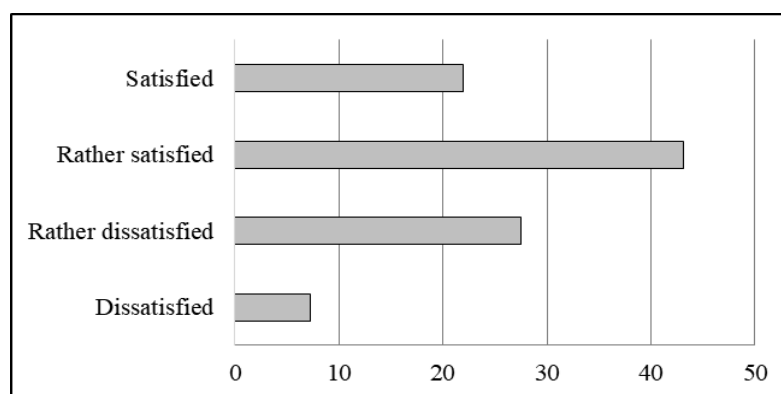
Source: The results of the survey conducted by the authors.

Remote teaching requires teachers to master new skills and competencies that previously seemed to be of little importance. This was another aspect we focused on in our survey. The teachers participating in our survey named the requirements they set for themselves based on their self-assessment and the experience of remote teaching (Table 3). According to the survey, the key requirement for a teacher working remotely is the ability to adapt their courses to the online format, awareness of modern digital technologies, and the ability to motivate and involve students in the distance learning process.

The level of satisfaction of teachers with working remotely was also different (Figure 2). About 62% of respondents were either completely satisfied or rather satisfied with remote work. 8% were completely dissatisfied, and 30% were rather dissatisfied than satisfied. We can thus say that most teachers view the remote format of teaching positively.

The comparison of the answers given by teachers from the five universities demonstrated that they gave similar answers to over a third of the questions. Teachers from all five universities (61-80%) said that distance learning helped to reduce the risk of infection. Similar numbers of respondents (30%-42%) also mentioned a slight decrease in the quality of education. Teachers from all the universities in question agree that the advantages of distance learning are the flexibility of the process (the use of digital technologies) (49%-70%), lower risk of infection (74%-91%), and saving of resources (time, money, etc.) due to the fact that they do not have to commute to work (52%-70%).

Figure 2 – Teacher satisfaction with remote teaching



Source: The results of the survey conducted by the authors.

The most popular education platforms are Zoom.US (80%-91%) and messengers (31%-50%). Most teachers use video conferencing for online classes (83%-100%). The other common means of communication with students are individual online consultations, online tests, combinations of various digital tools, e-mail, social networks, messengers, and posting study materials online. Quite a number of teachers from Perm, Kursk, and Voronezh experienced difficulties in acquiring computers and software required for remote teaching. A lot of teachers also lacked face-to-face communication with students and colleagues and had less free time.

Most respondents said that the key requirements for the teachers who work remotely are the ability to motivate and involve students in the distance learning process (61%-71%), and the ability to work both with groups and individual students.

Table 4 – The key difference in the answers given by teachers from different universities (percentage of the total number of respondents)

Questions	Perm	Kursk	Voronezh
1. Do you find remote teaching convenient?			
No, it is inconvenient and difficult	0.22	0.04	0.00
2. Have you noticed any changes in the quality of education?			
The quality of distance education is significantly worse than that of classroom learning	0.32	0.04	0.30
3. What advantages of remote teaching are the most important for you? (What do you like about remote teaching?)			
Comfortable environment	0.39	0.13	0.30
A chance to make classes more interesting	0.19	0.30	0.10
4. What education platforms and software do you use in remote teaching?			
BigBlueButton	0.36	0.04	0.50
Discord.com	0.14	0.00	0.50
Moodle	0.10	0.30	0.60
5. What means of remote communication with students do you prefer?			
Webinars	0.18	0.39	0.70
Chats	0.34	0.57	0.10
Phone calls	0.08	0.22	0.20
Skype	0.16	0.09	0.40
6. What problems did you experience while working remotely?			
Poor organisation of the distance learning process on the part of the university administration	0.18	0.00	0.00
Red tape	0.14	0.04	0.00
Less free time	0.35	0.35	0.50

Psychological challenges caused by remote teaching	0.12	0.00	0.10
It is difficult to concentrate on work being at home	0.22	0.09	0.00
I experienced no difficulties	0.03	0.13	0.00

Source: The results of the survey conducted by the authors.

Most teachers from different universities also agree that distance learning can further be used only as an additional tool (hybrid learning), while remote work should only be an option supplementary to offline teaching (68%-70%).

At the same time, the analysis demonstrated that certain features of the distance learning process differ depending on the university (Table 4). Thus, teachers from the Kursk Branch of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Southwest State University, and Voronezh State University found remote teaching quite convenient (50%-70%), while only 30% of teachers from Perm State University and Perm National Research Polytechnic University felt the same way. Teachers from Perm and Kursk actively use social networks (VK, Instagram, etc.) while VSU teachers prefer Moodle (60%). VSU teachers most commonly use webinars to communicate with students, while teachers in Kursk prefer group chats.

Most teachers from PSU, PNRPU, and VSU (68-80%) found it difficult to monitor students, while only 22% of teachers from Kursk had similar problems. VSU teachers experienced problems with the quality of Internet connection and suffered from increased fatigability. 18% of teachers from Perm complained about poor organisation of the distance learning process on the part of the university administration, and 14% faced red tape issues. Teachers from other universities did not experience any of these difficulties. 60% of VSU teachers said that remote teaching requires more time. The requirements for the teacher working remotely are also not uniform. Only VSU teachers think that stress resistance is important (70%), and 61% of teachers from Kursk believe that teachers should be able to create digital content that appeals to students. The variability of the answers can be accounted for by the fact that the survey was conducted among teachers from different academic fields (humanities, science, etc.).

Based on the results of the survey, we suggest the following recommendations on the improvement of remote teaching at Russian universities.

- Remote teaching during the pandemic demonstrated that some education services can be delivered in a digital format together with traditional classroom learning.
- Higher education institutions should develop teaching methods adapted to remote teaching and to the needs of students studying remotely.

- Teachers should master new skills related to digital technologies, digital content creation and digital communication.
- Universities should organise advanced training for teachers dedicated to the effective organisation of distance education, the development of time management and prioritising skills, and the ability to combine work and daily routine in a most efficient way.
- Teachers working remotely should have less workload for the same salary, since it takes more time to prepare for online classes, design additional study materials, maintain digital communication, and give feedback to home assignments.
- Higher education institutions should develop their own digital platforms for distance learning. They should also ensure free access to the most popular online education platforms, develop special software and applications for online testing and other assessment tools, provide teachers with the equipment required for remote teaching, and obtain servers that can ensure comfortable work with video content.

Based on the results of our study and personal teaching experience, we determined the areas of university activities where remote teaching can still be used as a supplementary form of education even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Distance education for full-time students, when the discussion of the topic and student assessment do not require the presence of the teacher.
- Distance education for students of any level and mode of education, whose curricula allow for online classes and virtual laboratories.
- Predominantly distance education for extramural students.
- Distance education for students with personalised curricula.
- Distance education for students with special needs: students with disabilities, international exchange students, etc.
- Distance education for students of corporate training programmes, advanced training and retraining programmes.
- Distance education for people who do not have enough time to attend offline classes, i.e. company managers, civil servants, etc.
- Universities can also invite employers and business professionals to teach remotely.
- Online meetings, methodological and scientific conferences, and other forms of cooperation with other universities, including universities in other countries.
- Activities that do not involve teaching and do not require the presence of teachers at university, eg. department meetings, academic board meetings, etc.

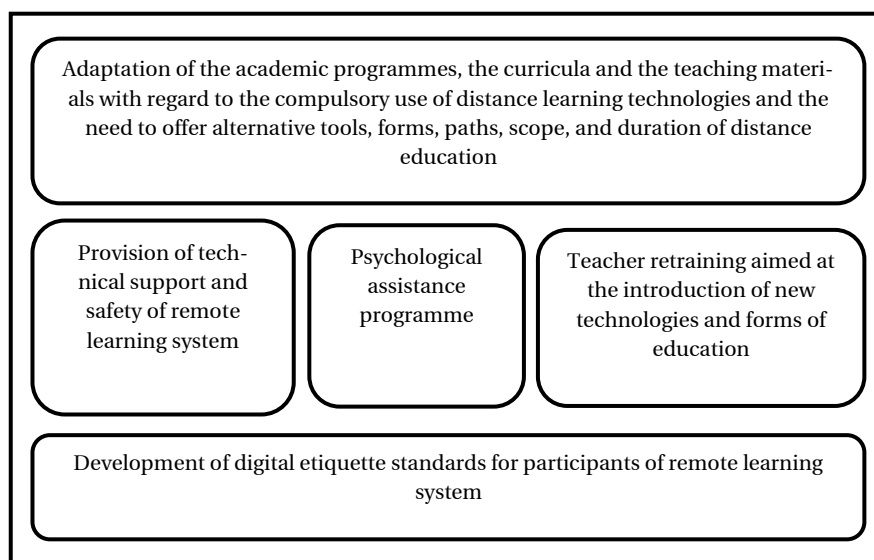
Discussion

The search for ways to improve the model of distance work used in practice for teachers of higher educational institutions is associated with providing them with timely and effective assistance in developing the ability to create and positively perceive new effective learning formats. This can be realized by developing a system map of measures to adapt university teachers to the use of distance learning technologies.

A system map of measures for the adaptation of teachers of higher educational institutions to the peculiarities of work in the distance learning system is presented in Figure 3. The mechanism provides, without fail, at the initial stage, the preparation of the appropriate regulatory and methodological support of the educational process, taking into account the peculiarities of a certain distance learning model, the mastering by teachers of a certain mandatory minimum knowledge necessary to work in the conditions of the distance learning model of a particular educational institution. In the future, it is planned to improve the qualifications of teachers both on the basis of specially organized courses and on the basis of self-education. Also, important measures that contribute to more effective distance work of teachers include the organization of technical support and information security of the distance learning system at universities and the development of digital etiquette standards that regulate the relationship between participants in the digital educational process.

The study presented here had some limitations. First, we focused on the interaction between teachers working from home and students. We did not consider the interaction between teachers and university administration or their colleagues. Second, a teacher's remote work, as any other job, involves a variety of activities. In our study, we only focused on the educational activities of teachers. We did not, however, consider other aspects, i.e. research activities, social activities, etc. Third, we only analysed remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, although universities in Russia started using distance learning long ago (though on a much smaller scale). Fourth, since teachers worked from home, their performance depended not only on their efficiency, but also on the environment. Hence, the results of the study were affected by such factors as teachers' private life, family wellbeing, working hours of other family members, etc. However, within our study we could not assess the effect these factors had on the teachers' satisfaction with remote work.

Figure 3 – A system map of measures for the adaptation of teachers of higher educational institutions to the peculiarities of work in the distance learning



Source: Own development of authors.

Despite the limitations, the obtained results demonstrate that remote work has its advantages and drawbacks and significantly transforms teachers' work. The study demonstrated that remote work opens a new field of digital communication between teachers and students and may serve as an alternative to the traditional classroom learning which dominated in Russian universities before the pandemic. Further research may focus on the use of a systematic approach to studying remote teaching at Russian universities with regard to the participants of the process and particular activities. It is also important to develop a model for the monitoring of remote work using the elements of adaptive control.

Conclusions

In our study of remote teaching at Russian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic we developed three hypotheses regarding the specifics of the distance learning process from the point of view of teachers. Although the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that it is possible to effectively transfer to remote teaching, remote work will not, in the nearest future, replace the traditional education format. Even though remote work has certain advantages, there are quite a number of teachers who find it inconvenient and are dissatisfied with the results. Remote work helps to reduce the risk of infection, allows teachers to combine work and private life, and save resources. The drawbacks of remote work include the lack of communication with

colleagues and students, increased workload, and increased fatigability. Only 20% of the teachers surveyed are completely satisfied with the results of remote teaching. This proves our first hypothesis, namely that remote work on its own is of little help to university teachers.

As a result of the study, we developed recommendations on the improvement of the remote teaching process at universities. This needs to be done, since most teachers surveyed in our study believe that distance learning can be effectively combined with the traditional formats and would like to be able to resort to remote work in certain situations even after the pandemic. This proves our second hypothesis concerning the effectiveness of a hybrid model of teaching at universities.

The third hypothesis appeared to be partially true. Teachers from five universities gave similar answers to over a third of the questions in the survey. At the same time, the analysis demonstrated that certain parameters differ depending on the university. The greatest difference in the answers given by teachers from different universities was observed when the questions related to the quality of education, the most popular digital platforms, and means of communication with students. The study also determined particular problems faced by the teachers in each university, as well as the requirements for teachers working remotely.

The results contribute to the theory and practice of remote work and specify the use and development of this form of teaching at universities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia. The obtained results can be used to design development strategies for universities during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as long-term strategies aimed at making the education process modern, flexible, more individualised, and more effective.

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