

THE BULGARIAN TEACHER AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Romyana Neminska

Thrakya University, Faculty of Pedagogy, 9 Armeyska Str., Stara Zagora

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6457-0243>

RINC: SPIN code: 5295-6029

ABSTRACT

Online classroom management is an innovation in the overall educational process. Its main characteristics - pedagogical communication, digital methodology and quality of online learning are the main semantic pillars on which this article is built. Empirical results from a teacher survey are presented. Their professional reflection outlines three research profiles: personal-professional, pedagogical-methodological, competence-reflexive. In the pedagogical analysis of these profiles a number of conclusions are formed for the management of the online classroom in the process of distance learning. They are related to issues such as basic methodological skills, digital skills of teachers; quality of education, continuing qualification, etc .. The question is to develop a digital methodology for more successful management of the online classroom in the process of distance learning.

Keywords: online classroom, methodology, pedagogical communication

1. INTRODUCTION

School education in its entire organizational and teaching nature is undergoing a serious online metamorphosis. With the implementation of emergency measures regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in Bulgaria, education is moving from one socio-life reality to another - online virtual reality. The first is filled with learning-cognitive emotional sensitivity, the second, suggesting cognitive-technological sensitivity. In the process of direct monitoring¹ of distance learning in the initial stage it was found that the qualitative characteristics of modern platforms for communication with multiple subjects on one screen change the characteristics of pedagogical communication in online learning environment. In the classical scientific literature, pedagogical communication is considered as a "mechanism for the implementation of the pedagogical process, respectively the process of education and the process of education" (Todorina, D., 2005). Pedagogical communication has its irrevocable socio-spiritual essence, which in its content includes the exchange of ideas, ideas, feelings, exchange of products from the spiritual sphere (ex.). The modern understanding of pedagogical communication considers it as a subject-subject communication, which is the basis of the educational process and is interpreted as a generator for the development of students' cognitive abilities, their social and emotional satisfaction with the learning process. Of particular importance in this subject is the style of

In the article, direct observation is understood as that observation in which the observer distances himself from the observed. He does not direct¹ or encourage the participants to action, he does not try to become a participant in the context. Direct observation suggests a more static perspective. The researcher observes certain situations without trying to immerse himself emotionally and effectively in the whole context.

pedagogical communication used by the teacher, who "has undoubtedly always been one of the key figures in the child's life" (Georgieva, D. 2019). Shivacheva - Pineda considers the style of pedagogical communication "as a complex integrative quality" of the teacher (Shivacheva-Pineda, I., 2019). Its main structures are the elements of pedagogical sociability - respect for the personality of students, richness and culture of speech, ability to express and listen, ability to handle non-verbal means, tact and discretion, empathy, sense of audience; personal and professional motives and dispositions; the pedagogical approach and behavioral model towards children and students (ex.). The pedagogical communication realized in the online learning environment outlines its pragmatic characteristics. Based on the scientific basis, it outlines a new characterology and specificity. The presence of technological cognitive-sensitivity to the learning process, of active technological positioning and active technological orientation of the student, puts the pedagogical communication in a little considered so far digitized aspect. At the same time, distance learning, through electronic resources and online platforms puts the teacher in a new technological methodological environment. In this environment - on the one hand there is a greatly shortened study time (20 minutes), in which the educational pedagogical communication takes place in front of the screen, on the other hand there is a reflection on the methodological metamorphosis in the ways, styles and teaching methods. The structure of the lesson and the structure of the types of lessons - for new knowledge, for exercise, for generalization, considered in the didactic issues acquire new grounds in the virtual learning environment. In her didactics Teneva, M. presents the types of lessons through "one of the most common classifications according to the didactic purpose: - combined lesson; - lesson for new knowledge; - lesson for repetition and systematization; - lesson for formation of skills and habits; - a lesson for control and assessment of knowledge, skills and habits "(Teneva, M., 2012). The pragmatic online environment places a number of teaching methodologies in a new scientific environment, which necessitates the development of digital methodologies applicable to online learning. And also requires in the university curricula for training of teachers to be developed classes for digital methodology in the respective discipline. In her article, Doncheva J. also addresses the issue of: "innovation of traditional, non-traditional, remote and E-methods, as well as education, improvement of the knowledge of the Bulgarian teacher and lecturer" (Doncheva, J., 2014). Online training has clearly shown the need to develop interdisciplinary curricula. As here, this refers to the development and testing of a digital methodology, through which teachers will acquire skills to reflect on the curriculum, observing the methodological requirements and digital parameters of the respective online platform. In his didactics Petrov, P. tries to outline the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. It outlines the advantages of "flexibility, accessibility, convenience", "multi-platform" and the ability to make changes in the learning content "only in one place - on the server where the course is located." As one of the shortcomings of distance learning Petrov defines its static and lack of live human communication. (Petrov, P., 2016). Rather, here we can talk about a new type of communication - through modern information and mobile technologies.

The accepted form through which the learning activity is conducted in an online environment is the virtual classroom. Online training of students in the period of emergency is carried out through several major platforms - Moodle, Shkolo, Microsoft Teams, Google Zoom. The virtual classroom, organized in different platforms and the different tools that are applied in

it, are not unknown as a form and elements of learning in the school and academic educational space. Many Bulgarian teachers and lecturers in their innovative practices use virtual classrooms and a variety of online tools for teaching and sharing good pedagogical practices. The virtual classroom has functionality that allows a direct, synchronous connection between learners and learners. It is an organized learning environment in which a digitalized methodology and technological pedagogical communication are applied to conduct an educational process. It provides an opportunity for online learning and online pedagogical communication. The very applicability of this form - as a quality of education, methodology of conducting classes, as emotional, motivational, cognitive and health status of the subjects in the virtual learning-cognitive space is debatable and subject to empirical and scientific research. This article is subject to research commentary factors such as online classroom management, quality of online learning, and methodology of online learning.

2. ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING PLATFORMS USED BY BULGARIAN TEACHERS

The successful organization of distance learning is preceded by a number of technological innovations introduced in the various schools identified as innovative. Innovative teachers in the Bulgarian school use a variety of technological tools through which they update the learning process and outline the technological "pretext" of distance learning. As such, the following can be considered here:

- Virtual augmented reality. Using the Google Expeditions app (free and available through a Google Account / G Suite), students can travel to the farthest corners of the world. Students, working with these tools, create virtual tours, design their own path to knowledge. Google Expeditions is a platform that offers virtual travel and educational materials in most of the disciplines studied. Through this platform the project-based training is realized very successfully.

- Mobile learning. Mobile learning (m-learning) is the next stage of virtual learning, but it is also a transition to qualitatively new platforms based on mobile communications. M-learning is the basis of technological training and introduction of technological platforms. Applications developed for mobile phones develop online learning skills that appear to be basic and pragmatic in distance learning.

- Distance learning platforms. The main characteristics of distance learning platforms outline them as modern educational technologies. Through them there is an opportunity for the learning process to be realized in all its stages and functions. To stimulate cognitive activity, to monitor student progress, to evaluate tests and homework. Distance learning platforms have the functional role of maintaining subject-subject relationships in a distance format. They place the teacher in a new online learning environment that he or she can manage with a new digital methodology, digitized resources, and technological relationships.

- Platforms for real-time video meetings: online.danlink.bg; Moodle; 8X8 (similar to Google Zoom but without restrictions on the number of participants in the meeting, without time restrictions, without registration - participants follow the link and enter), G-Suite - it has built-in platforms that can be used separately for online video meetings: Google Meet, Handgouts, Envision, WriteReader Book Creator, Lino.it, Tink link SmarTest, Microsoft Sway, Wizer.me, Quzzuz.

- Platforms that can be used for project activities, team and individual tasks - in the synchronous and asynchronous form of distance learning: Google Classroom, Seesaw Liveworks. The platforms Google Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Shkolo are most widely used in distance learning.

- The Google Zoom platform provides video conferencing with up to 100 people. Participants can be divided into smaller groups within the session. When viewing presentations, solving tasks, reading an excerpt from a text, the screen can be shared with the participants so that the slides that are being commented on or the assignment they need to work on can be seen.

- The Microsoft Teams platform has similar features. It can store digital learning materials so that they can be accessed at any time. Here teachers can create and evaluate online tests, give feedback. Teachers can deliver live lessons online, show presentations and share the screen on their computer, and students can see through their devices. Everyone can participate in the lesson by talking or chatting.

- Shkolo platform. It has 1 million registered users. Of these, 50,000 are teachers and 950,000 are students and parents who use the platform daily via a web browser or mobile application. There are several modules in this platform. The "Communication" module provides an opportunity for a quick connection. The Learning Materials module allows the sharing of learning material (lesson, homework, exercise, etc.). The "Tests" module allows you to create practice or exam tests. In the exam test, there is a certain time window in which students have the opportunity to complete the test (eg 90 minutes). After the specified period, students can see the answers and understand how they coped. The evaluation of the test works is in automatic or semi-automatic mode. At the moment, more than 1000 tests have been created on the platform. In addition to everything else, teachers can record video lessons through the program. The program is free and translated into Bulgarian. After recording a video, teachers can upload the recording in the "Learning Materials" module of the platform and share it with their students. The video lesson can be watched by students directly.

- Social media. Social networks play an important role in the educational space. Due to their easy accessibility and manageability, social networks are becoming an informational and regulatory educational tool. Through their capabilities can be organized video conferencing, chats to comment on a particular problem. Strongly motivating in the training is the use of tools that the audience knows and uses without difficulty.

The listed platforms and tools are mostly used by teachers and lecturers to carry out the educational process. In this sense, online classroom management requires specific skills that are accumulated and developed only in a technology-based learning environment.

ONLINE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT (TEACHER SURVEY)

Nikolaeva, S. defines that "initially the classroom itself is treated as an object of management, which should become a protected and well-structured working physical space for the needs of education." (Nikolaeva, S., 2011) In this sense, to claim that online classroom management is directly linked to the online workspace; a space in which students follow rules, perceive and respect authorities, exchange ideas and knowledge. In other words: the socio-spiritual essence of pedagogical online communication is realized. Classroom management, oriented towards "utilization of the educational opportunities of technology-based models" is directly related to the level of technological culture of teachers (ex.). That is why the self-reflective survey of teachers (distance 1) conducting distance learning brings to the fore personal issues such as level of professional motivation, ambition, level of digital competence, difficulty and quality of education.

The purpose of the survey is to outline the main pedagogical dispositions related to distance learning. On this basis, to outline the main methodological and pedagogical issues that should be addressed and more fully and richly developed in the scientific community.

Target group of the survey: primary school teachers. 102 primary school teachers from all over the country were interviewed. The choice is random so as to cover the diverse regions of the country, both economically and socially.

Content of the survey: The survey contains 10 questions related to professional self-reflection, motivation, methodological and competence self-assessment. There are three research profiles: personal-professional, pedagogical-methodological, competence-reflexive.

The personal-professional profile reflects the pedagogical experience of the interviewed teacher and his reflective self-assessment of the number of online platforms he works with (questions 1-2). The empirical data from this profile are summarized in a relational table (Table 1):

Table 1. Relational table

teachers (no.)	internship (year)	platforms (no.)
24	3-5	2-3
28	6 -10	3-5
22	11-20	3-5
28	20 - 39	4-6 (>)

To the summarized relational data is added the use of e-mail, Viber, facebook, mobile phones for contact with parents, stated by the respondents. The main platforms indicated by the teachers include a number of tools that they use in their preparation and in the process of working with students. Empirical data from the survey show that in addition to the main platforms, teachers include platforms such as: Google Classroom, Seesaw, Liveworksheets, Envision Play, Write Reader Book Creator, Lino.it, Tinklink, SmarTest, Microsoft Sway, Wizer.me, Quzzuz and many more. etc.

The pedagogical-methodological profile is outlined through the self-reflective assessment for online classroom management (questions 3-6). The pedagogical-methodological profile most clearly outlines changes in the main characteristics of the management of the online classroom - pedagogical communication, methodology and quality of education. On the 3rd c. "Has your self-study process and time related to distance learning changed?" 82% of teachers say yes. Their answers outline a diverse palette of electronic resources, which they independently prepare, find in various educational sites (listed: Ucha.se, Academico) and combine with the educational content on paper. Teachers' prior preparation for distance learning increases "many times over" (according to a survey). At the same time, teachers specify that "checking online homework takes more time than usual." It can be concluded that 82% of the surveyed teachers are not prepared to work in an online environment, that the methodology that is applied is related to the professional sense, will and competence of the particular teacher. The remaining 18% of the surveyed teachers answered that even before the introduction of online learning they work online with their students and the preliminary preparation did not require additional efforts from them - personal, organizational and competence.

Question 4 can be considered as a verifier: "How has the management of the learning process in the online classroom changed?". The surveyed teachers report in different ways the change in the management of the online classroom. Some of them associate it with "active control and help from parents" - 22%. Another part connects the change with the "delegation of more rights to students for self-control" - 18% (summary response of teachers from innovative classes). The remaining 60% outline issues such as the lack of a "direct view of the student's independence", the lack of a direct emotional connection, which is "highly motivating for young

students". Most teachers associate the change with: instructions on how to work with the platform, tracking the discipline of technological support - working with microphones and cameras (time to turn on, off, mute).

An important issue in the management of the online classroom is the retention of interest and motivation of students in the online session. Many teachers report that they fail to manage discipline in the classroom because students are looking for an emotional dialogue with each other. In this profile 5.c is considered as the main question. "Has your style of pedagogical communication with students changed?" At a self-reflective level, a large proportion of teachers - 82% outline as a research problem the quality of pedagogical communication and mastery of the online audience during online learning. In this sense, the change in the style of pedagogical communication is expressed in a new type of listening and non-verbal skills, skills to assess current activity by means of verbal and non-verbal communication in online communication, presentation of a new behavioral model by teachers. In this aspect, the empirical data for question six are also considered: "Has the system of teaching methods you normally use changed?". The answers of some of the respondents outline specification. According to them, the methods of online learning have enriched the overall methodology with "visual-auditory, interactive in digital mode, constructive-applied, heuristic-experimental - many times more." In another order of analysis are answers such as: "Yes, change is inevitable. I miss teamwork; lessons outside school - in the museum, in nature. In this sense, it can be argued that online learning forms and reproduces teaching methods by adapting and technologicalizing them to distance learning. (Here the question may be asked: And does it follow that perhaps adolescents are offered a new kind of sensation, new perceptions of nature are developed, the museum - through the technological matrix of the online environment?). The last question from the pedagogical-methodological profile is directly related to the methodology - "How often did you have to" compress "the lesson content in the process of online learning?" but none of them commits to an opinion on how it methodologically justifies the choice of teaching material.

Competence-reflexive profile. The competency-reflexive profile is related to the teacher's satisfaction with the participation and his / her professional contribution to the online learning (questions 8-10). This profile is built on three issues related to self-reflective assessment of professional competencies and the quality of training. The need for help in the process of distance learning is expressed by 79% of the surveyed teachers. Within these limits, the answers are that in the period of online learning teachers have to master and use more than three platforms and many electronic resources and tools. Self-learning and mutual assistance between teachers are the leading factors for the successful conduct of distance learning. Therefore, the assessment of the success of distance learning can be considered quite subjective: the surveyed teachers are professionally satisfied with their personal competence achievements, but it cannot be said that these achievements are relational to the success of students in distance learning. This conclusion is also outlined by the answers to the question: "How do you think the quality of distance learning can be improved?". In summary, the statement: "the quality of distance learning can be enhanced by training teachers to work in a digital environment"

3. CONCLUSIONS AND GENERALIZATIONS

Self-reflective profiles outline semantic (regarding the purpose of the study) professional dispositions related to the management of the online classroom.

Disposition: Pedagogical communication. Outlined by issues related to self-preparation, communication style, management and methodology. In the article, classroom management is considered not as a physical space, but as a space saturated with socio-spiritual sensibility and subjectivity. The analysis of the empirical answers points to the fact that the teacher gives a lot of professional energy, will, perseverance to digitize his skills, to create resources for work, to fill in online documentation. Spiritual-sensory knowledge remains in the background. From the problematic issues it emerges that teachers fail to immerse themselves in the management of this socio-spiritual sense; that subject-subject relations (subjectivity) give way to imperativeness and manufacturability. The interaction of the teacher with students from the screen, the lack of social-cognitive sensitivity puts him in a situation of psychological tension and professional insecurity regarding the learning processes in the online classroom. The use, the application of the "resource", no matter how rich in content, takes away from the main characteristics of pedagogical communication in the physical classroom.

Disposition: Methodology in the management of the online classroom. Online teaching is a specific digital competence, which is built on two main basic skills: high mastery of online resources, high mastery of methodological combinatorics (multiple teaching methods) and multimedia methodology. Only 18% of the respondents (outlined as innovators) state the management of the methods and their application in a digital environment. Here it is important to note that the innovative environment in which they work as teachers plays an important role in their development, namely: innovative schools. In this sense is the answer of one of the respondents: "In innovative classes, distance learning is easy and organized, unlike ordinary ones." intuitively and are insufficiently mastered. An important element of the methodological disposition is the use of many digital resources, bordering on the didactic simulation - educational videos and films. In this sense, direct observation points to the research fact that such methods are used and applied spontaneously, albeit in conjunction with the learning content. In this sense is the answer of one of the respondents: "In innovative classes, distance learning is easy and organized, unlike ordinary ones." intuitively and are insufficiently mastered. An important element of the methodological disposition is the use of many digital resources, bordering on the didactic simulation - educational videos and films. In this sense, direct observation points to the research fact that such methods are used and applied spontaneously, albeit in conjunction with the learning content. They take up online time rather than perform their learning function. The research fact is that the problem that none of the surveyed teachers includes in their methods of online learning project-based, project-oriented, problem-based learning. In summary, it can be argued that the methodology used in the management of the online classroom in the process of distance learning has its spontaneity, methodological ignorance and intuition. The surveyed teachers cannot specify the change in the methodology, although they report it.

Disposition: Quality of education in the online classroom. Determining the quality of learning in the online classroom is determined by many factors. At a self-reflective research level (empirical answers), quality is relevant to the success of the distance learning process, not so much to the success of students. At the theoretical and methodological level it can be argued that in order to determine high quality in the management of the online classroom, each teacher needs to have the already commented above-basic level, at which methodological ease to use an online learning resource. As here, it should be emphasized that the empirical data from the personal-professional profile do not outline a relation above-basic methodological level - professional experience.

The derived dispositions with their breadth and multidirectionality on an empirical level outline the directions in which the theoretical and methodological basis for the development of online learning should be developed: methodology and specifics of pedagogical communication. Our teachers should develop management skills and emotional-professional resilience in online classroom management.

Application 1

SURVEY		
(Self-reflective assessment)		
1.	Your professional experience is	Personal-professional profile
2.	How many platforms did you use in the distance learning process with students?	
3.	Has your distance learning process and time related to distance learning changed?	Pedagogical and methodological profile
4.	How has the management of the learning process in the online classroom changed?	
5.	Has your style of pedagogical communication with students changed?	
6.	Has the system of teaching methods you normally use changed?	
7.	How often did you have to "compress" the lesson content in the online learning process?	Competence-reflexive profile
8.	Did you need professional help in the distance learning process?	
9.	Do you feel professionally satisfied with distance learning?	
10.	How do you think the quality of distance learning can be improved?	

REFERENCES

- Todorina, D. (2005) Culture of pedagogical communication, Blagoevgrad
- Georgieva, D. (2019). Facilitating communication as an alternative method of teaching written communication in children with multiple disorders. *Strategies of Educational and Scientific Policy*, 27 (2), 178-195.
- Shivacheva-Pineda, I. N, (2019) Styles of pedagogical communication in contemporary educational realities, *Innovation and entrepreneurship*, ISSN 1314-9253 Vol. VII, number 1
- Teneva, M. (2012) Mastering the didactic issues by students, part 2, ed. Thrakya University
- Doncheva, J. (2014) Historical-pedagogical retrospection from the systems and methods for teaching to the electron-based forms of distance learning. In: *Proceedings of the Scientific Conference, Center for Distance Learning at NBU, Publishing Complex at NBU*, pp.65-71, ISBN 978 - 954 -753-208– 3
- Petrov, P., (2016) *Contemporary Didactics*, ed. Avangard Prima ISBN 978-619-160- 688-7
- Nikolaeva, S., (2011) *Class Management*, ed. Bulvest 2000, ISBN 978 954 426 897 8