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**DISTANCE EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY DURING THE COVID 19  
PANDEMIC: REFLECTION OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS**

**Sandra Kotlebová**

University of Saints Cyril and Methodius  
Trnava, Slovakia

**Edita Poorova**

University of Saints Cyril and Methodius

Kotlebová S., Poorova E. Distance education at the university during the Covid 19  
pandemic: reflection of teachers and students edita@objective-xyz.net

ORCID ID –<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9877-1118>

[edita@objective-xyz.net](mailto:edita@objective-xyz.net)

**Abstract.** The article aims to reflect the provision of distance education by university teachers and students during the COVID 19 pandemic. The authors draw on theoretical sources in distance education and focus on its use in general and specifically at the university, concentrating on a teacher and a student. They provide an analysis of data obtained through a questionnaire designed for teachers and students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia when full-time education was absent for more than one academic year because of the Covid 19 pandemic. The article is completed by a case study reflecting the theme by a teacher of English for Specific Purposes. We compared our survey with the findings of several foreign surveys on higher education and the COVID 19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** distance education, COVID pandemic, university, teacher, student, ESP.

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## Научная статья

# ДИСТАНЦИОННОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ ВО ВРЕМЯ ПАНДЕМИИ КОВИД 19: РАЗМЫШЛЕНИЯ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЕЙ И СТУДЕНТОВ

**Сандра Котлебова**

Университет Св. Кирилла и Мефодия в г. Трнаве  
г. Трнава Словакия.

**Эдита Поорова**

Университет Св. Кирилла и Мефодия в г. Трнаве,  
ORCID ID –<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9877-1118>  
г. Трнава Словакия.  
[edita@objective-xyz.net](mailto:edita@objective-xyz.net)

**Аннотация.** Цель статьи - отразить предоставление дистанционного образования преподавателями и студентами университета во время пандемии COVID 19. Авторы опираются на теоретические источники в области дистанционного образования и фокусируются на его использовании в целом и конкретно в университете, концентрируясь на преподавателе и студенте. Они приводят анализ данных, полученных с помощью анкеты, разработанной для преподавателей и студентов факультета социальных наук Университета Святых Кирилла и Мефодия в Трнаве, Словакия, когда очное обучение отсутствовало более одного учебного года из-за пандемии COVID 19. Статью завершает кейс, отражающий тему, проведенный преподавателем английского языка для специальных целей. Мы сравнили наше исследование с результатами нескольких зарубежных опросов, посвященных высшему образованию и пандемии COVID 19.

**Ключевые слова:** дистанционное образование, пандемия COVID, университет, преподаватель, студент, ESP.

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## 1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to reflect the situation in higher education, which due to the unfavourable epidemiological situation during the COVID pandemic in the academic year 2019/20 and subsequently in 2020/21 was implemented distantly at almost all universities in Slovakia. The subject of the research is distance teaching

during this period within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. The aim of the research was to obtain data on the reflection of teachers and students on the provision of distance education in the researched period. The analysis of the data obtained through the questionnaires is completed by a case study, which presents a reflection of the researched topic by a teacher of English for specific purposes. We compared our survey with the findings of several foreign surveys on higher education and the COVID 19 pandemic.

## **2 Theoretical background**

We searched for theoretical issues for the processing of the topic in the professional literature, which deals with distance education, respectively e-learning and online teaching. We define these forms of education in general and specifically in the higher education area. When we read the statements of various authors on the topic of distance learning, resp. e-learning, we felt that at the time the authors wrote about it, it was a bit like science fiction. Most authors before 2020 (e.g. Barešová A., 2003 [1]; Kopecký, K. 2006 [2]; Zlámalová H., 2008[3]; Zounek, J. et al., 2016[4]) describe e-learning as learning that can be effective in distance learning, but many of them remain at the level of the future tense or potential present tense. Of course, none of the authors mentioned above talks about the immediate transition from full-time learning to distance learning, nor about the possible reasons for such a situation. And none of them at all anticipate that global distance education could come, moreover at all levels, as there was a general consensus among them at the time that distance education was particularly suitable for adults.

Therefore, the theoretical basis for dealing with the topic of this paper is only a kind of "soft" framework for the reality we have searched, i.e. the sudden change from full-time teaching to distance learning, which occurred without any preparation, at all levels of education and almost worldwide. We think that when Slavík M. (2012, [5] p. 49) stated that every time requires, among other changes, a change in the way people communicate, he did not anticipate that there could come a time that would bring such a change from day to day. Before the pandemic, the authors of the literature could afford to say that although information and communication technologies are used quite often, the systematisation of e-learning is very complex and thus the education system is unable to respond to rapidly evolving technological developments and the like. For example, Petty, G. (2008, [6] p. 291) speaks of the use of computers in teaching and learning as a possible future, and although he evaluates it positively and emphasizes its potential contribution, it seems as if he does not trust that teachers would be able or willing to do so. Since he wrote this in 2008, we can forgive him for this careful style. In the latest edition of this book from 2019, the author does not even comment on this topic (Petty, G. 2019[7]).

For the purposes of our contribution, we focused on the definition of e-learning as part of distance learning. E-learning is a real educational process in which information and communication technologies are used in accordance with ethical principles, while the way they are used depends mainly on educational goals and content, the nature of the educational environment, needs and possibilities of all actors in the educational process. It is important to take into account several aspects of e-learning, such as its widespread use and many problems, whether technological or pedagogical ones, that its use brings. E-learning cannot be mechanically linked to the

concept of distance learning. It is always a controlled process, with online learning being defined as a subset of it (Zounek J. et al., 2016[4]).

In the characteristics of distance education, resp. e-learning the authors agree on some essential aspects:

**a) It is a multimedia support of the educational process**

Modern information and communication technologies is usually implemented through computer networks (Kopecký, K. 2006[2]; Štefančíková, A. 2012[8], Zlámalová, H. 2008[3]). According to Kveton, P. (In: Štefančíková, 2012, p. 17[8]), e-learning is characterized by a combination of pedagogical, technological and network understanding. In the pedagogical dictionary (Průcha J., Walterová E., Mareš J., 2009, p.66[9]) e-learning is defined as a type of learning in which the acquisition and use of knowledge is mediated by electronic devices.

**b) Distance education, and within it electronic education, is intended primarily for adult education, resp. university students**

Electronic education, so-called e-learning, resp. online study is a teaching form of distance education, which is typical mainly for higher education. The reason is the need for strong motivation of the student, who must be very active during the study, must cope with loneliness in the study, force to study regularly and be able to subordinate their interests and other obligations to this fact (Zlámalová, H. In [3]; Rohlíková, L., Vejvodová, J., 2012[12]). The statement of Slavík M. et al (2012, p. 160[5]) that *"current university students represent a generation that has already grown with information technology and therefore their use is a matter of course for them. Computers are not technology for students - they are a normal part of their lives. Being connected to the network is a vital necessity and today the network is available almost everywhere"*, not only has not lost its relevance, but its validity has also shifted to lower levels of education. The Internet and digital technologies provide pedagogy with a basis for creating new educational approaches and for the implementation of open, flexible and distributed teaching. Introduction of electronic forms of education and use of e-learning elements in teaching have become an imperative of today, which mainly concerns higher education institutions and institutions providing further education (Hašková A., Klocoková D., 2006, p. 64[10]).

**c) Distance education presupposes the independence and motivation of the student**

Emphasis is placed on the individual nature of the study, the focus on the student, his motivation, responsibility, activity and awareness. However, e-learning is not suitable for all types of students, it is rather a suitable complement to classical teaching in the form of so-called blended learning. This combination enriches the educational process (Zlámalová H., [3]; Průcha J. In [9]; Rohlíková L., Vejvodová J., 2012, p. 151[12]), Barešová A. (2003, p. 37[1]). In the Memorandum on Open Distance Learning in the European Community (1991), the European Commission also characterizes distance learning as self-study (Memorandum o otvorenom dištančnom vzdelávaní v Európskom spoločenstve, 1991).

**d) Distance education uses various tools to assess students**

A great benefit of distance learning is the possibility to monitor students' knowledge during learning. A number of tools for student assessment like testing, discussion and portfolio can be used in e-learning, with the advantage of immediate feedback when using online tests, although the possibility of cheating students is relatively common.

**e) The role of the teacher is important in distance education**

The traditional role of the teacher in e-learning has been changing; the teacher becomes a constructivist tutor, facilitator and guide (Gottlieb, M. In [11]; Rohlíková L., Vejvodová J., 2012[12]). However, the real educational activity results from the live interaction of the teacher and the student, and what the students learn is not the merit of the computers but the teaching. In e-learning, the teacher needs to guide, direct and control students, and the collaborative aspect of e-learning should not be limited to teacher-student communication. Teachers are expected to flexibly change the proven stereotypes of their pedagogical thinking and educational work over the years and should be experts in facilitating learning and dealing with any educational situations (Sirotová, M. 2014, p. 11[13]). The idea that teaching would be based only on ICT tools was unrealistic at the time.

**f) Distance education is linked to lifelong learning**

The importance of online education and its increasing scope is emphasized in the professional literature mainly in connection with the growing importance of lifelong learning in the future (Slavík M. et al., 2012, p. 165[5]). Rohlíková L., Vejvodová J. (2012) [12] in the characteristics of electronic education (online course) do not even talk about online live teaching, but about the use of video or audio recordings combined with written texts. Other authors also define distance education as a form of study where the teacher and the student are not in direct contact (Dvořáková, E., 1999[14]).

Electronic communication in higher education is necessary, but it should not be overestimated. At the university, it is not possible to ignore the means of information and communication, because they bring dynamization of cognition and awareness of the benefits of technology for education, but we must not forget the direct contact of the teacher with students, because only such contact influences and develops interpersonal relationships, trust, cooperation, relationship with the field of study, etc. Direct communication is the only way to develop students' value orientation. It cannot be replaced by impersonal technology. It is necessary to strive for a certain balance between ways of communication so as not to weaken the humanization of education (Danek J., 2014, p. 119[15];).

The vital role of learning is to obtain the preconditions for actively coping with the natural and social environment and remains the same in a rapidly changing modern society. However, the preconditions for a fuller, more active and creative life that learning is supposed to provide are changing. What has been adequate for man in the last century does not meet the needs of the current student. The key competencies of the 21st century are communication, creativity and innovation, cooperation, critical thinking and problem solving, technological competence plus

new literacy - ICT literacy, digital, internet, information and media literacy (Čáp J., Mareš J., 2001, p. 80 [16]).

### **3 Covid 19 International Surveys and Studies on Higher Education**

Before presenting the results of the survey we conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences UCM in Trnava, we would like to present some findings from surveys and studies focused on the impact of COVID 19 on higher education. One of them is an extensive international survey, which was conducted in 2020 on the basis of 424 responses from 109 countries, mainly from Europe and Africa. The profile of respondents, who were among the most common respondents, was broad; faculty members accounted for 20%, institutional management 17%, and heads of foreign departments 16%. Almost all of the institutions surveyed were affected by the COVID 19 pandemic, with 59% of respondents saying that all activities within their institutions had been stopped. (Up to 77% in Africa). Despite the fact that 91% of higher education institutions had the infrastructure to communicate with staff and students, respondents said they were immediately looking for other ways to improve this communication. Almost 80% of respondents assumed that COVID19 would have an impact on student admission in the next academic year, that it would affect both domestic and foreign students, and some, especially private universities, also mentioned negative consequences for their funding. Two-thirds of higher education institutions reported management consultations with government authorities in the context of public policy development in relation to COVID 19. Almost 48% of respondents said that the Ministry of Education supported them, especially in managing the end of the academic year. In terms of partnerships, 64% of higher education institutions said that the COVID19 pandemic had affected them in some way - 19% spoke of weakening, 18% of strengthening and 31% had formed new partnerships. Almost all higher education institutions that participated in this study report that COVID 19 had an impact on teaching, with two thirds of them replacing full-time distance learning, which brought various challenges, from technical problems to the implementation of specific study programs. At the same time, it opened up opportunities for them to use flexible teaching tools. COVID 19 has had a major, negative impact on international student mobility. 60% of higher education institutions have increased virtual mobility and collaborative online learning. More than half of the universities have decided to conduct the semester exams as planned, albeit mostly through new measures. In terms of research, COVID 19 had the greatest impact on international activities, such as conferences, which were cancelled or postponed at 80% of universities. 52% of institutions experienced problems with the completion of scientific projects. COVID 19 has also influenced the community activities of higher education institutions (Marinoni, G. et al., 2020[17]).

Another study reveals how international students and higher education institutions around the world have responded to this situation. The survey involved 11,000 students and 400 respondents from higher education institutions around the world. The aim of this survey was to find out how students react to the crisis associated with the coronavirus epidemic. When asked if the coronavirus affected the study plans, 46% said yes, 29% did not and 25% did not know. (The Impact of the Coronavirus on Global Higher Education, 2020[18]).

Another study presents the conclusions of several online discussions organized for staff of various universities in May and June 2020 on the topics of education, research, internationalization, quality of student life, and social engagement and university management. Based on the findings, the study deals with suggestions for future solutions to problems within the discussed topics. In the field of education, online teaching has become a daily reality for all universities, with "emergency distance learning" for all institutions rather than systemic online education, and it is therefore necessary to consider how to prepare for a possible distance learning systemically and comprehensively. In the field of research, society's interest in scientific research at universities has increased, especially in connection with the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on education, but on the other hand some opportunities for scientific research have been limited, e.g. access to laboratories or libraries. The area of internationalization was one of the first to be hit by this crisis, with foreign relations departments being burdened from day to day by organizing the return of foreign students to their countries, as well as the return of their own students from abroad. There was an increased need to take care of students who did not return home and remained in college. And although physical contacts have been broken, they have been replaced by a number of different online activities. In the area of social engagement, which is one of the universities' missions as a service to society, during the pandemic, most universities engaged in various local community activities to help people in need, mostly volunteering by students and teachers. The management of the university moved to the online space, new and sudden problems had to be solved, often without state support. The management of the university had to deal with the organization of teaching, the operation of the institution, the support of teachers and students, without preparation and initially without guidance. Of course, the crisis and its solution also had a negative economic impact on the operation of individual universities. The study comes up with some suggestions for the future for each area discussed. In the field of education, hybrid (full-time and online) and combined (online and distance) teaching can be a solution. New methods and tools for teaching and testing and assessing students should be developed. Combined teaching could persist in case of local problems, but the emphasis is on full-time teaching and testing. In the field of research, the emphasis on physical presence will remain, e.g. in laboratories, archives, but some research activities such as desk research or conferences can be carried out online. COVID 19 will remain a research topic. In the field of internationalization, mobility can take place in combination, with a specific proposal refer, for example, to the virtual start and physical end of mobility. Online activities will be strengthened and the system of mutual recognition of credits should be unified. Some universities may have to focus on recruiting more students from their own countries. In the area of social interest of universities, the voluntary activity of universities during a pandemic can be used and the mission of universities in this area can be transformed. The management of the universities will focus on the preparation of the following academic years, taking into account the possibility of hybrid and combined teaching, but with the priority of full-time teaching, at least in the first semester. The emphasis on communication needs to be strengthened so that students feel that they are welcome that the institution is interested in them and that they are sure that the university has the situation under control. Universities should be financially supported in implementing emergency measures. University staff should be

comprehensively supported, whether by university management or the state. The university management should have a strategic plan in place to respond flexibly to a situation similar to the COVID 19 pandemic (Recio S.G. et al., 2020[19]).

#### **4 Survey - Reflection of teachers and students for distance learning during the Covid 19 pandemic at the Faculty of Social Sciences UCM in Trnava**

For the survey, we used the method of quantitative research - a questionnaire, which we created in two versions - one version for teachers and the other for students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava - with the main goal of finding out how they reflected distance learning during the COVID 19 epidemic. Our survey, which we conducted through the Survio online questionnaire system, involved 33 teachers of various subjects at FSS UCM in Trnava, whom we asked the following questions:

1. How do you evaluate the first reaction of the university (faculty) to the outbreak of the Covid 19 epidemic in Slovakia in February 2020?
2. What was the teaching support of the university (faculty) like?
3. As a teacher, did you have access to adequate technical equipment for the implementation of distance learning?
4. How did you implement distance learning in the summer semester of the academic year 2019/2020? 5. How did you test the students?
6. How did you assess the students?
7. Did adapt the curriculum or a syllabus of a subject to the given situation?
8. How did the examination of students differ from the full-time teaching?
9. Did you study professional literature focused on distance learning?
10. Did you communicate with colleagues about distance learning?
11. How was the communication with the faculty management?
12. In the academic year 2020/2021, compared to the previous semester 2019/2020, were there any changes in the teaching, testing and assessment of the subjects you taught?
13. How do you rate the MS Teams platform?
14. How did you test the students?
15. How did you assess the students?
16. What problems have you encountered in distance learning?
17. What positives can you see in distance learning?
18. What negatives can you see in distance learning?
19. What could be transferred to classical full-time teaching?

The majority of teachers agreed that the first reaction of the university management to the anti-pandemic measures was adequate - good or very good (90%). Teachers (100%) positively evaluated the teaching support of the faculty. Everyone had access to adequate technical equipment (100%). In the first semester, most teachers communicated with students by e-mail, only 2 teachers used the online Zoom platform. Later, 65% of teachers used MS Teams to teach, 25% used other platforms (Zoom, MOODLE) and the remaining 10% used only e-mail communication. Regarding the examination, 80% of the teachers stated that they preferred the written

examination through MOODLE, the other teachers tested almost equally in a combined or oral form through Teams. The majority of teachers (75%) evaluated students on an ongoing basis - assignments submitted during the semester, active participation in online teaching and 25% of teachers tested only orally. All teachers (100%) adapted the curriculum to the changed teaching conditions. Compared to the full-time form exams and assessments, students had the biggest problems with connecting, some students did not join the online classes at all, the reasons are unknown, and there were also cases of cheating on the written or oral form of the exam or trying to deceive the system. However, what bothered the teachers the most, 80% said that the students showed a relatively high level of passivity, many did not know how to get used to adapting to online teaching. Problems with online teaching have led some teachers to study professional literature focused on distance learning (10%), 25% stated that they consulted with colleagues, mostly from their own department. In the questionnaire, we asked how teachers evaluated the MS Teams platform, which they used the most in online teaching. 85% rated it as good or very good, some (15%) used the Zoom application. All the teachers (100%) agreed that the positive of online teaching is a certain comfort and support for students to self-study. 34% of teachers stated that it is an adequate substitute for full-time teaching, 66% do not see any positives, as according to them students are passive, examination tools are limited and students are considerably demotivated. On the other hand, teachers stated that the combined form of full-time and part-time teaching can make study more attractive and accessible.

There were 100 students of different study programs who took part in the questionnaire survey. We asked them the following questions:

1. How did you perceive the beginning of distance education at the Faculty of Social Sciences in the summer semester 2019/2020?
2. Was the reaction of the management of the faculty (university) adequate?
3. How did the teachers react after the introduction of distance learning?
4. How did the distance learning go?
5. How were you tested?
6. What did the teachers evaluate?
7. What do you think was positive about online teaching?
8. What do you think was negative about distance learning?
9. How do you evaluate the whole next academic year 2020/2021 from the point of view of the organization of distance education at FSS UCM?
10. Has the support of online teaching by the faculty (university) in the year 2020/21 improved compared to the summer semester of 2019/20?
11. How do you rate the MS Teams platform?
12. If you used a platform other than MS TEAMS, state which and what its positives and negatives were.
13. What could be transferred to classical full-time teaching as beneficial from the period of distance learning?

The analysis of the achieved data shows that up to 41% of respondents perceived the start of distance learning as the beginning of an uncertain period and 31% stated that they had no expectations. 28% of students perceived this period at the beginning as a holiday period, which was likely to end after two weeks. 95% of

students reported that the FSS UCM management responded adequately and that teachers contacted them almost immediately and sent assignments for two weeks. Due to ongoing anti-pandemic measures, full-time teaching was not resumed after two weeks, and distance teaching was launched at all UCM faculties in Trnava. 88% students stated that they communicated with teachers by e-mail, to which they sent seminar works and other assignments, and 12% had teaching via the Zoom or Jitsimeet application. The first semester in the form of distance learning also brought changes in testing during the exam period. Respondents stated that they submitted written assignments and seminar works, which accounted for 55% of the final evaluation. The question "What did the teachers evaluate?" Provided very balanced answers - in the range of 70-90% of the teachers evaluated written tests, the oral exam and the written assignments. 60% of students stated active participation in online learning as mandatory, i.e. as a condition for assessment. Distance, resp. online teaching meant some negative but also positive changes in the life of each student, of which they first stated that they did not have to travel to school (80%), it was convenient for them (54%) and they saved money (52%). 37% of respondents considered positive that they were comfortable with self-study. On the other hand, many (60%) felt a lack of social contacts, they also had technical problems (44%) and 80% thought they had not learned as much as they would have learned in the full-time form of study. 10% of students stated that they could not adapt to online teaching at all. After the demanding summer semester of the academic year 2019/2020, the first in the distance form, a new academic year 2020/2021 came, which was finally realized fully in the distance. Students rated this academic year as good or very good (50%). They reported that the faculty's support for online teaching had improved significantly and teachers used various platforms. The MS Teams platform was most often used, which they rated as good (50%) or very good (34%). Zoom users appreciated better connection and the fact that the training went smoothly even with the cameras turned on. Written testing took place through Moodle and Teams, with Moodle students evaluating rather negatively due to low time limits for answers and problems with submitting. Respondents do not report negatives when testing through Teams. Finally, we asked students for their suggestions on what could be transferred from online teaching to classic full-time teaching. External students agreed that they would welcome a hybrid form of study, a combination of online lectures plus full-time contact hours, depending on the nature of the course. Full-time students stated that they would prefer full-time teaching due to the above-mentioned problems in online teaching. 75% of respondents appreciated the so-called block teaching, the form of which was chosen by the FSS UCM throughout the academic year 2020/2021. It is important to mention that according to the results of the survey, they learned to study much more independently in the distance form of study, and therefore they would welcome more research, case studies and practical assignments at school in the full-time form of study.

## **5 Case study - reflection of the teacher of English language in professional communication on the given situation**

To supplement the analysis of the survey results, we present a case study, which presents the reflection of the teacher of English language in professional communication on the given situation. The structure of the following case study

corresponds to the questions we asked teachers of various subjects at the searched faculty. The teacher of English in professional communication carried out teaching in the study fields of European Studies and Politics, Public Administration and Social Services and Counselling during the research period. This subject is taught at the faculty in 4 semesters of the bachelor's degree. Teaching support from the university, resp. faculty, since the beginning of the declaration of an exceptional situation in connection with the COVID 19 pandemic, was evaluated positively by the teacher. University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava and subsequently the Faculty of Social Sciences responded adequately and interrupted full-time teaching for two weeks, while the teachers received clear and, according to the teacher, appropriate instructions. The form of teaching changed to distance learning, the task of teachers was to send students assignments and provide them with feedback. Although teachers did not have access to adequate technical equipment at the beginning of the distance learning, mainly because there prevailed the general opinion that this would last only for two weeks, the teacher later adapted independently and started to use the Zoom platform, which became freely available. The teacher used also e-mail communication with students, which was mainly for sending assignments, study materials and providing feedback. In this way, she carried out teaching in the summer semester 2019/20, so it was a combination of online teaching according to the schedule valid for the full-time teaching method and a distance form. The students' examinations were continuous, the teacher did not take the examinations through tests or the oral exam. She evaluated the students on an ongoing basis for oral presentation and assignments. She provided all students with feedback in the form of corrections, comments and evaluation of completed assignments. The teacher did not change the curriculum or the syllabus of the subject, she only pointed out the changed evaluation conditions. During her teaching practice, the teacher continuously studied professional literature focused on distance education, but during real distance learning she only communicated with colleagues in order to exchange experiences. Communication with faculty management was very good. Certain changes took place in the academic year 2020/21, as the pandemic continued, as did distance learning at universities in Slovakia. During the winter semester of the academic year 2020/2021 FSS UCM planned teaching in the so-called blocks to prevent more students from meeting each other. But full-time teaching moved back to online space after two weeks. This semester, universities were already provided the Microsoft Teams platform, which had also been used by the faculty. Block teaching was more suitable for teachers and students of professional subjects, but in the case of the English language, this form did not suit teachers or students. The lessons were long (3 hours) and their frequency low (sometimes only once every two weeks). The MS Teams platform was evaluated by the teacher positively, as it has many tools very suitable for distance learning compared to the Zoom platform. On the other hand, video connection is better in the Zoom platform. Although it is possible to carry out various tests through Teams, the teacher did not use them for testing. The examination of students was continuous and the final oral exam was in the form of a presentation and discussion. The evaluation of students was slightly intuitive, as the quality of students' performance was distorted by the distance form of teaching. During distance learning, the teacher experienced certain problems and limitations, such as unequal technical opportunities for students to access online teaching, differences in active participation during the lesson, increased physical and

mental strain on the teacher (multiplied computer hours caused her back problems, work from house did not suit her, she lacked social contacts). According to the teacher, distance teaching undoubtedly has some positives, it can temporarily replace full-time teaching, for example, when the teacher cannot come to school for some reason, or when organizing a colloquium, discussion, consultations, presentations, oral exam, etc. According to the teacher, the disadvantage of distance teaching is mainly that it does not represent a full-fledged substitute for full-time teaching. Some of the positives of distance learning mentioned above could be transferred to classical teaching, i.e. if necessary, activities that can be managed in the online space can also be implemented remotely. In addition, the Teams platform can continue to be used by the teacher as a very good tool for communicating with students, assigning and assembling tasks, and providing feedback.

## **6 Evaluation of survey results**

Based on the analysis of data obtained through questionnaires for teachers and students of the researched faculty, we can conclude that distance education and its implementation in the form of online teaching supported by various e-learning tools (MS Teams, Zoom, Moodle and others) is a relatively effective way that can partially replace full-time teaching at a time when this is not possible. The survey showed that teachers approached this form of teaching differently, especially from the beginning, when only a small number of teachers used online platforms. After a year, this situation changed significantly. Most teachers evaluated the management and support of teaching by the faculty and university management positively. Teachers and students considered the use of the Teams platform, which was provided by the university for all relevant users to be significantly helpful. Most teachers considered the distance form to be worse than a full-time one. The biggest negative turned out to be the loss of social contact, the interruption of social contacts within the university, with abroad as well as with the public. Although many conferences, competitions, discussions and other events had moved to the online space, the impossibility of organizing them in person had a negative impact on the overall life of the university, especially the Faculty of Social Sciences. The survey shows that not all students in the home environment have suitable conditions for online learning and good access to the Internet, which caused feelings of injustice and frustration and even inferiority. Students positively evaluated the professional approach of teachers to the changed form of teaching, the interest of the university and faculty, as well as the overall course of distance education. Many students noted that their motivation and ability to plan properly and be adequately prepared for teaching and self-study increased. Many students liked the comfort of teaching, including lower expenses, although, on the other hand, they lacked social contacts. As a whole, the survey has shown that despite some problems distance teaching and learning during the COVID19 pandemic at the Faculty of social sciences at UCM in Trnava was managed and evaluated quite well both by teachers and students. It has brought certain positive experiences which can be used in the future.

## **7 Conclusion**

In our opinion, distance learning is at odds with the historically given social function of the school. The original purpose of distance education is to enable the education of individuals who, for some reason, cannot or do not want to be educated,

and such education should not be offered nationwide but individually. Distance learning should be used only when it is not possible to implement regular full-time teaching and should not be considered a full-fledged substitute for full-time teaching. As the survey showed, the responsibility for the distance form of teaching cannot be left to the individual, i.e. a teacher, as was the case at the beginning of the pandemic, but should be guided by the management of the institution and, of course, by the state. It is necessary to seek feedback from students and respond to issues.

Competent institutions should evaluate the situation in higher education that has arisen in connection with the COVID 19 pandemic and develop a strategy for providing education in similar situations, taking into account all possibilities and not only solutions that may negatively affect the quality of not only education but also life. It is necessary to prevent extreme situations from bringing extreme solutions, such as the widespread replacement of full-time teaching with electronic teaching, the abolition of full-time testing, the introduction of online testing, etc.

On the other hand, despite the huge negative consequences, this global pandemic was also an extraordinary time for learning and gaining completely new experiences. This crisis has taught us how adaptable and resilient education systems, policy makers, teachers, students and families can be. The role of teachers had evolved rapidly before, and in this period it has become more complex in many respects than when learning took place only in person. As a crucial factor were the teachers because they had to meet this challenge at all levels of education, and in higher education in particular, their competences need to be strengthened by investing in developing the necessary skills and capacity building to realize the full potential of distance, possibly blended learning (Barron M.et al., 2021[20]).

Following the experience of distance learning during the COVID 19 epidemic, in order to build stronger education systems, individual countries should analyse the experience and design educational initiatives that have proven effective and integrate them into the mainstream education system. As it turned out that during the pandemic, especially at the beginning, the individual countries were left to their fate not only in the field of education, the Slovak Republic in particular should mobilize in this effort, and if the European Union is to help in some way, we can only welcome it, but we should not rely on it. Undoubtedly, distance learning also has strengths and can therefore temporarily replace full-time learning. Some of its positives could be transferred to classical teaching, i.e., if necessary, activities that can be managed in the online space can also be implemented remotely. In addition, online platforms can continue to be used by teachers as very good tools for substitute teaching, communicating with students, assigning and assembling tasks, and providing feedback. Distance learning during a pandemic has been an experience for higher education that needs to be worked on in the future, although we all hope that the situation that has led to its widespread introduction almost worldwide will not be repeated.

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**Information about the authors:** Sandra Kotlebová, University of Saints Cyril and Methodius  
Trnava, Slovakia

Edita Poorova, Ph.D. (Theory of English Teaching (PhDr.), Higher Education Pedagogy (Ph.D.), Vice-Dean for Foreign Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Saints Cyril and Methodius  
Trnava, Slovakia  
[edita@objective-xyz.net](mailto:edita@objective-xyz.net)  
[edita@objective-xyz.net](mailto:edita@objective-xyz.net)

The authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

**Информация об авторах:** Сандра Котлебова, Университет Св. Кирилла и Мефодия в г. Трнаве  
г. Трнава Словакия.  
[edita@objective-xyz.net](mailto:edita@objective-xyz.net)

Эдита Поорова, доктор (теория обучения английского языка и педагогика высшего учебного заведения), зам. декана по международным связям, Факультет социальных наук, Университет Св. Кирилла и Мефодия  
ORCID ID –<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9877-1118>  
г. Трнава Словакия.  
[edita@objective-xyz.net](mailto:edita@objective-xyz.net)

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