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INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE DIGITALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITIES

Abstract

The article discusses the pedagogical possibilities and tasks of creating favorable conditions for the organization of part-time education in higher education institutions in the context of digitalization of education. The article examines the close relationship between the concepts of "distance learning", "full-time learning" and "part-time learning".

The features of distance learning in vocational education in various countries are analyzed, as well as the transformation of this concept in modern realities. The article examines pedagogical research to identify the difficulties of part-time learning, both on the part of students and on the part of teachers. In addition, the study formulated pedagogical conditions for the implementation of part-time learning using digital technologies in higher educational institutions of Kazakhstan.

The study shows opportunities for students to improve their professional knowledge or obtain an academic degree without interrupting their work. It was concluded that part-time education can be implemented on the basis of distance learning technologies, open online courses and online communication.

Keywords: digitalization of education, distance learning, part-time study, online education, time management.

Introduction. The daily increase in the capabilities of computer network services is likely to influence all spheres of society. To be precise, new concepts and terms such as part-time/full-time study, distance learning, online education, short-term study, etc. appeared in the education system as a result of digital capabilities advances most especially during and post-COVID era

(Portugal et al., 2023; Bergene et al., 2023; Grynyuk et al., 2022; Slykerman et al., 2022; Alismail 2023). These terms seem to gain rapid popularity in mass use. For instance, the term "correspondence education" has disappeared in many countries and has been replaced by new terms: "part-time education" in Russia, "full-time distance learning" in Kazakhstan, "part-time study" in Great Britain, "distance learning" in Germany, etc.

By the Law " On introducing changes and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the issues of expanding the academic and management independence of higher educational institutions", higher educational institutions may design and offer flexible and integrated educational programs that allow obtaining a bachelor's degree in an accelerated mode. Moreover, the educational institution sets the tuition fee itself. One of the measures aimed at improving the quality of higher education is the transition to distance learning as a full-time study base (Law, 2018).

Starting from January 1, 2019, the admission of students to correspondence education in higher educational institutions in Kazakhstan has been suspended. As a result, the option of correspondence education at higher educational institutions has become unavailable entailing some issues for people pursuing higher education degrees after obtaining vocational (technical and special professional) education as well as for those willing to improve their knowledge and skills or to change their profession by the principle of "lifelong learning". To solve the issue, it was proposed to introduce "distance learning" for full-time study mode. This phenomenon was a usual practice worldwide. For instance, in the USA the International Council on Correspondence Education was changed to the International Council on Distance Education in 1982 since distance education is considered as a continuation of correspondence education (Keegan, 1996).

Distance learning is designed for applicants who already have higher education but still want to get another degree in a similar specialty in a shortened study period as well as "persons with technical and professional or post-secondary education" (Law, 2015). In other words, distance learning students are currently over 20 years people, who consciously choose a professional direction, who want to study while working, mothers with young children, conscripts, disabled persons capable of working, elders, returnees, and foreign citizens. The dynamic development of society arises from the need to improve the education of "elder" citizens in the context of life-long learning (Anastas, 2022). However, such measures cause inconvenience for distance learning students. In particular:

1) there are no opportunities to participate in classes (direct communication with the teacher) while working at the same time;

2) lack of opportunity for mothers with young children to go to higher education institutions;

3) full-time tuition is more expensive than correspondence education tuition;

4) difficulty in getting a job after graduation and lack of experience.

These problems are a serious challenge not only in Kazakhstan but in many countries. The literature review showed that many scientists studied the concepts of distance learning and part-time study and revealed their meaning and practical use. Precisely, Bervell, et al. (2021) studied distance learning; Salonen et al., (2021) discussed online learning; Butcher & Rose-Adams (2015); Rokicka (2014) researched part-time study; Boelens, et al., (2018), Hofmann (2018) wrote about blended learning; Gohberg, et al., (2022) researched a part-time study in full-time mode.

Although a lot of research is being conducted, there are still aspects of the problem that need resolution because it is intended to introduce changes in the country's existing education system without destroying it. In addition, each country may choose to switch to a different form of education. In European countries, part-time study is common for master's and PhD programs. The goal of solving the mentioned problem is to determine the pedagogical possibilities of part-time study for obtaining a bachelor's academic degree in the context of the digitalization of education. The main task of the study is to explore the pedagogical conditions necessary for the realization of part-time study implementation via open online courses and online communication.

Conceptual background. The analysis of regulatory documents of Kazakhstan concerning the organization of the educational process in universities and previous studies on the topic of this research was carried out. To reveal

the meaning of the main concepts and terms Kazakhstani documents were analyzed since the research is focused on the adapted use of part-time study in Kazakhstani higher educational institutions. Studying and analyzing the previous research of foreign scientists in the latest decade allows for adapting part-time study programs to the Kazakhstani education system and determining its advantages.

Part-time study is based on distance learning. "Distance learning is a study process carried out during the interaction of the teacher and students at a distance using information and communication technologies and telecommunication tools".

Higher education institutions use distance learning technology based on the full-time study form ("full-time-distance learning") as an alternative to the "correspondence" study form for students studying in a shortened form of education (Law, 2018a; Shadiev & Huang 2020).

At least 20% of the educational program courses are taught online (online learning is part of "full-time-distance learning"). The rest of the study is conducted in offline mode, that is, in full-time form (Law, 2015).

Salonen et al., (2021) consider the online activity of students specializing in teaching (pedagogical education) in the context of blended learning, which includes online classes and face-to-face classes. According to their research, a meta-analysis of teaching analytics in higher education shows that the potential of determined teaching analytics to improve the quality of teaching is high. The same authors claim that distance learning and online learning should be increased. Therefore, it is necessary to find tools that increase the efficiency of the educational process.

Another comparative study acknowledges that there is no difference in the academic performance of the students who work full-time and part-time jobs (Kamp, 2021). Moreover, O'Connor & Cordova (2010) assume that often the aim of elder people who intend to enroll in part-time study is to obtain a diploma or certificate necessary to keep a job in their professional field or to get a job of their desire and that part-time students have the motivation to study.

Pedagogically, it is determined that the vast majority of students studying part-time develop their main professional skills during their part-time study and that university courses are

effectively based on the learning experience (Wylie and Cummins, 2013).

According to Bob (2021), although there is no difference in the academic progress of students studying in the full-time and part-time systems, there are noteworthy points in the general organizational features. Moreover, to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of full-time and part-time studies several practitioners' reviews such as Consultant Accepted, Former Admissions Dean/Director Michigan (Ross), Cornell (Johnson), ASU (Carey) were compared.

As for full-time study, it has the following advantages: full-time study allows students to fully master the curriculum, and they may be awarded a scholarship. Furthermore, while studying full-time, students may undergo mandatory internships as a part of their study in an organization and/or institution with high potential.

However, the authors mention (Bob 2021), that the disadvantages of full-time study are (1) overloaded study programs, (2) very low possibilities to work at the same time with studies, and (3) expensive tuition fees . Another disadvantage is that there is a risk of losing a scholarship which may be the main source of funding for some students.

As for the part-time study, the main advantage might be that there is an opportunity for a student who works and studies simultaneously to apply the knowledge from the part-time study in practice at work (Begin, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Also, it might be easier to find a new job considering the prior work experience while studying part-time (Lucky, 2021).

However, part-time study might have disadvantages as well. For instance, a part-time student might not be qualified enough to undergo an internship at an advanced institution. Also, there might be a discrepancy in the teaching experience of teachers in part-time study (Lucky, 2021).

The analysis of teachers' opinions on the effectiveness of digital educational platforms depending on gender, work experience, age, level of education, class of study, type of school, and variables related to on-the-job training revealed significant differences between the assessments of various platforms. (Yazici et al., 2022).

Purpose of study. The article deals the pedagogical possibilities and tasks of creating

favorable conditions for the organization of part-time education in higher education institutions in the context of digitalization of education.

Materials and methods. A qualitative research design was used to get primary data since it aims to explore the pedagogical features of the organizational process of part-time study in the context of the digitalization of education. It is appropriate to use a qualitative approach for the study since it is utilized to understand experiences and concepts which is in line with the purpose of the research.

Data collection tool. The qualitative survey, interviews, and analyses of educational platforms were selected as research methods for this empirical research. A qualitative survey was chosen to find out the experiences of part-time students. It might be usually argued that surveys are used for quantitative study when questionnaires with scalable answers are collected to obtain quantitative data. However, in this study, the survey consisted of descriptive questions with open-ended answers about the students' experiences of part-time study. Therefore, it is rational to use a survey for this study to explore students' experiences of part-time study in the context of the digitalization of education in Kazakhstan. The collected data from the survey was further explored in interviews.

The next research method used for this study was an interview. An interview is helpful to explore opinions and experiences in qualitative research. Specifically, the interview was utilized in this study to further explore the students' experience of part-time study in Kazakhstan by crossing with teachers' opinions and experiences.

The third research method was the analysis of online educational platforms such as Coursera, Lektorium, Stepik, etc. This analysis is essential to be used as a research method since the collected data are to be used for exploring the pedagogical features of part-time study.

The research site was several universities in Kazakhstan. Two universities were in the west, another university was in the south, and the other two universities were in the central part of Kazakhstan. Personal networking was used to find a gatekeeper for each university.

*Participants. I*n 2022, 41 distance learning students, majoring in "physics" and "informatics" educational programs, were surveyed from one university in south Kazakhstan and one university in west Kazakhstan. The sample consisted of two groups. The first one was 41 university students who study physics and informatics in part-time mode from a university in west Kazakhstan and a university in south Kazakhstan. In terms of ages, they were 19-53 students: 25-53 years - 2.6%, 21-25 years - 89.7%, and 19-21 years - 7.7%. The first sampling group was employed to explore students' experiences of studying part-time in the context of the digitalization of education. It was determined that the participants of the survey received their first professional education in the form of full-time education at the college level - 7.3%, and at the university level - 90.2%.

The second sampling group consisted of 3 teachers of physics and informatics: 1 professor, 1 PhD, and 1 with a master's degree from each university. These sampling criteria for teachers was used to explore the opinions of experienced teachers, teachers who conduct research, and teachers at the very beginning of their career.

Results. Looking at the answers to the question "Why did you consider it necessary to study a second time to develop your skills?", it was found that 43.9% of the respondents studied at the university to change their jobs. For instance, a specialist with a qualification in "Radio electronics and Telecommunications" wants to become a "physics teacher" or "information systems teacher" in the future. That is, it aims to change the direction of the educational program (for example, from technical direction to education, etc.).

According to the survey, 34.1% of the respondents want to change their major because their educational programs do not correspond to the work they are doing, that is, despite having a bachelor's teaching. For example, although a participant previously studied and graduated as a biology teacher, he/she wants to become a physics teacher rather than a biology teacher.

Among the participants, the percentage of students studying part-time in physics and informatics to obtain a bachelor's academic degree is 12.2%.

It was determined that the rest of the participants who took part in the survey studied to solve social and financial problems because they were unemployed.

Most participants, i.e.,38, said that studying part-time while working is effective, whereas only a small number, i.e., 3, of participants said

it is not effective. Part-time study is helpful because the participants want to keep their jobs while studying, a student-mother who takes care of a child wants to continue her studies at home, and a student with health issues considers it better to study during her free time after receiving treatment. In addition, they paid attention to the fact that the tuition fee for part-time study is cheaper than for full-time study. 3 participants who preferred a full-time system to part-time study believe that full-time study is suitable for in-depth learning of educational content, formation of professional skills, and effective for future employment.

The next question of the survey was "If you were offered the following part-time study option, would you accept it? The student conducts training (lecture, practice, seminar, etc.) remotely on their own, and communication with the teacher (weekly, thematic consultation) is online with a special schedule (after working hours or on Saturday). The exam can be in a mixed form (online proctoring or offline at the university)," all respondents unanimously supported the proposed part-time study option.
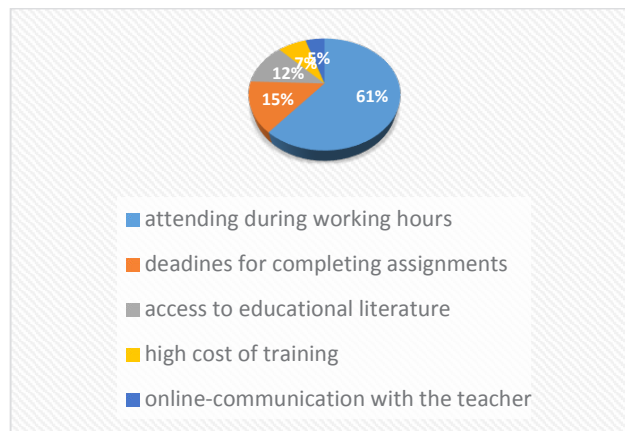

Figure 1. *Difficulties for distance learning students*

There are some difficulties for distance learning students who have to attend remote classes daily, often during working hours. 61% of the participants find attending classes during working hours difficult, while 14.6% of the participants are challenged by deadlines, 12.2% of the participants have difficulties in remote access to educational literature, 7.3% of the participants consider the high cost of tuition as an issue, and 4.9% of participants experience the difficulty of online communication with the teacher (Figure 1).

To the question "Which distance learning platforms did you use when teaching", the majority of respondents, both teachers and students, indicated ZOOM (50%) and Google Meet (39%), Moodle LMS (25%), and Google Classroom (18%) platforms.
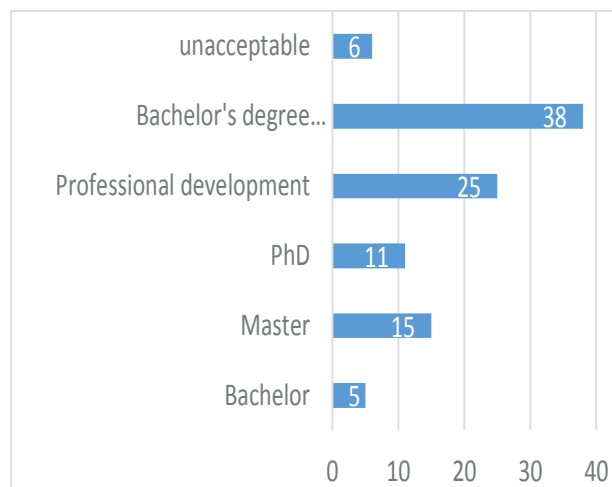

Figure 2. *Degree of education that more effective for part-time study*

Also, the survey of teachers found out which degree of education is more effective for part-time study, the majority of respondents chose to obtain a bachelor's degree (based on existing secondary specialized or higher education) - 38%, for professional development– 25%, a master's degree – 15%, PhD -11%, a bachelor's degree (first education) – 5%, unacceptable -6% (Figure 2).

The data collected by the survey were also triangulated by interviews conducted with teachers of 2 universities in the west of Kazakhstan, 2 universities in the central part of Kazakhstan, and a university in the south of Kazakhstan. As a result, the interviews revealed the teachers' opinions about the need for part-time study and ways to organize it effectively. In particular, suggestions were made about conducting teachers' consultation hours on training courses in the evening of working days and on weekends to be conducted in online mode in a synchronous format, presenting the lecture in video and text forms, and having tests on each topic.

The analysis of online educational platforms revealed that Coursera, Lektorium, and Stepik educational platforms offer courses in English and Russian, but it is difficult to find courses in the native language, i.e., in Kazakh.

As a result of collected theoretical and empirical data, a comparative analysis of the full-time and part-time study in a higher educational institution was done. Full-time study is suitable for first-time undergraduate students because they can consult with a teacher, share ideas with other students face-to-face, and devote free time to their personal lives. Part-time studies are suitable for students with previous professional education and for students who study while working because they can study without interrupting work, it is easy to find a job in the educational program, time management skills might be improved, and there is an opportunity for inclusive education.

Part-time study opens new opportunities through distance learning technology in full-time mode. It modernizes the system of digital education in the era of digitalization. However, part-time study and distance learning in full-time mode also have similarities and differences. Table 1 summarises the similarities and differences between distance learning in full-time mode and part-time study

Table 1. *Similarities and differences between distance learning in full-time mode and part-time study*

Distance learning in full-time mode (during working hours)	Part-time study
At least 20% of the educational program is conducted remotely	Most of the educational program (90-95%) is conducted remotely
Students must attend classes	There is no obligation to attend the class. Students learn educational materials at their convenient time.
Textbooks are available	Not all textbooks are available
Regular communication with the teacher is carried out through face-to-face meetings	Communication with the teacher is arranged through the weekly online consultation hour
Tuition fees are high	Tuition fees are likely to be reduced
Open online courses provide additional learning opportunities for the student	Open online courses are the main source of information for the student
Internships are scheduled according to the educational program	Internships take place by adjusting the individual study trajectory or at the student's workplace if the workplace corresponds to the educational program

Discussion. Currently, there are different views on distance learning in the literature. For instance, distance learning is used as "educational technology," "educational form," and "educational system." Bervell, et al., (2021) define distance learning as a technology that provides two-way interaction between "teacher-to-student" and "student-to-teacher". This work

clarifies the definition given in the Law (2007) of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" and shows the correctness of the term "distance learning technology" in our study.

John Butcher claims that part-time studies are convenient for students to get a job. Having studied the service of an Open University in Great Britain, he suggests that part-time study should be implemented by creating an open university (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015).

Rokicka (2014) states that part-time work of 16-17-year-old children while studying might lead to lower academic performance. The age range of part-time study, i.e., 16-17 years old, is not in alignment with our study because part-time study requires a student to complete college or higher education. In this case, the age of the student should be not less than 20 years. By the Kazakhstani rules, a student studying part-time is eligible to obtain a second or further bachelor's degree only after completing at least one bachelor's degree (Law, 2018b). In many foreign educational institutions, part-time studies are usually acceptable to obtain a master's degree.

According to Callender & Thomson (2018), the number of student body has been changing notably in the last decade, and since 2010 the number of full-time students in England has begun to decrease. Precisely, in 2015 the number of full-time students decreased by 51% and in the open university by 63% (Callender & Thompson, 2018).

In Russia, at the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year, the percentage of part-time students was 52.1% of the total number of graduate school students, at the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year it was 42.2%, and at the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year, 39.3%respectively. Moreover, compared to full-time students, part-time students have a higher proportion of women from villages who are married and have children. This might mean that many students need to study part-time due to their family situations (Gokhberg, et al., 2022). These studies show that the number of part-time students has been decreasing. However, part-time studies are still of vital importance.

According to Davies (1999), a part-time study model guided by the principle of "lifelong learning" is an effective, high-potential resource for higher education institutions, but the individual might not receive the full amount of education. Therefore, in many countries, it is preferable to transfer correspondence education to part-time study based on distance learning.

The American Society for Learning and Development found in a series of studies that 36% of all training programs in organizations are delivered through computers. However, it is concluded that the effectiveness of digital learning depends on each teacher and the specifics of each subject (Brookshire, et al., 2019; Kovacs 2020).

On the contrary, Medeshova (2022) states that distance learning could be actively implemented, and it is possible to teach through open online courses. The author considers open online courses as a resource. It is possible to create favorable conditions for distance learning for the student, and effective planning of study time, that is, the designing of individual learning trajectory depends on the student (Medeshova, et al., 2022).

- Face-to-face learning is considered appropriate by authors who envision blended learning as a technical and software support (operation of the electronic library 24/7, continuous operation of the educational platform of the higher educational institution, stability of the network connection),

- content (creation of open online courses, access to video lectures, textual, tabular, graphic materials, tasks, control tools, literature),

- methodical support (teachers' preparation for teaching part-time students and organizing online consultations),

- professional development of teachers: combining the roles of a traditional teacher, coach, mentor, and managing adviser in the start-time learning system and creating a teaching and tutoring environment that is a resource for continuous learning and teacher development.

- time management (capability to use time rationally, getting rid of psychological stress due to lack of time, solving social problems).

Sequence of content blocks that are sequenced to create individual learning trajectories and learning modes. Digital communication and digital resources should be used in blended learning (Salonen, et al., 2021; Bervell & Arkorful 2020).

Part-time study might be more suitable for inclusive education than blended learning (Jackson, 2012). In the article about the support of adults studying part-time or part-time students,

Jackson (2012) considered part-time study as the pedagogical method for solving the problem of inclusive education.

According to Anastas (2022), online learning has been growing rapidly since the 2010s. Some colleges, universities, and social work programs are being moved entirely to online learning.

It is intended to provide online education in higher education through mobile devices in Bangladesh (Khan, et al., 2019).

According to our research, full-time and part-time study have their features. In today's digital society, it is quite possible to integrate the advantages of online education with full-time and part-time study within the framework of the digitization of education. It is possible to organize study with a flexible schedule according to the student's convenience and capabilities. If the learner is a student with a disability, a working student, or a student with a young child, then they are more likely to choose to study part-time.

If the technical, programmatic, content, methodical, and time-management aspects of part-time study are covered, online communication and open online courses might replace correspondence education. An open online course includes content and feedback. These strengthen relations with peers and teachers. A student can plan research work or professional internships for a suitable period based on the individual learning trajectory.

Conclusion. As a result of the research, the conditions that must be provided to change "daytime distance learning" into part-time study at a higher educational institution were formulated as follows:

If the above-mentioned pedagogical features are provided, the part-time study is likely to be organized so that the student can fully learn the chosen educational program. In particular, part-time study is conducted in a blended mode (online and offline) so that working students can study without interrupting their work. Analysis of students' questions and lectures is carried out on working days evenings (after working hours) and weekends according to the changing schedule of the teaching council. Part-time study might be more beneficial for a part-time working student than face-to-face in the classroom.

By achieving the intended goal, it was determined that it is possible to design an educational platform with an open online course and online communication as the core by fulfilling the necessary pedagogical conditions for it. The creation of an educational platform is the next important phase of research.

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ON THE WAY TO DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SHOWCASE OF NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Abstract

The paper delves into the essential role of universities in providing all students with equal access and opportunities, focusing on their specific responsibilities towards this goal. It scrutinizes the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusivity (DEI) policy at Nazarbayev University (NU), highlighting its dedication to an inclusive academic atmosphere. Evaluating NU's DEI practices is crucial, reflecting the university's commitment to an inclusive educational environment. The paper emphasizes the critical need for practical, effective implementation of DEI policies, moving beyond mere theoretical discourse. It examines various strategies and initiatives to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are genuinely embedded in the university's culture, curriculum, and community life.

Furthermore, it identifies persistent challenges to achieving real inclusivity in higher education and proposes solutions through innovative and consistent university leadership efforts. Concluding with a forward-looking discussion, the paper suggests potential improvements and strategies for NU's leadership to refine DEI policies. These recommendations encompass policy modifications, program development, and community engagement to establish a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Keywords: equality, access, inclusivity, responsibility of educational institutions, the concept of DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Nazarbayev University experience.

Introduction. This paper discusses the institution's responsibility to ensure access and choice for all. It concludes with a discussion of opportunities the NU leadership can consider to enhance DEI policies on the institutional level and some brief concluding remarks. One more important discussion point in this paper is that the concept of inclusivity may vary across the universities. The purpose of this paper is to encourage other Kazakhstani educational institutions to start by asking a question about what inclusion means and how it could be represented in a particular academic community in a particular social context, to share practical examples "in the vicinity" of how a selective institution can ensure access and choice for all.

Main part. The paper mainly draws on relevant literature and document sources, emphasizing the university's responsibility to ensure access and choice for all. It provides examples from the case-study institution, NU.

Among the valuable for study and reasoning, in our opinion, we would like to highlight the experience and research of experts in higher and graduate education, who: