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ONLINE EDUCATION AS A TEMPTATION: UNOBVIOUS CHALLENGES

LEKCJE ONLINE W EDUKACJI JAKO POKUSA: NIEOCZYWISTE WYZWANIA

Abstract: The article is devoted to phenomenal and procedural aspects of online practices implementation in modern education systems on the example of Ukraine. Online practices meet open and hospitable acceptance and adoption from the side of managers of education, politicians, some part of researchers, lecturers, and students. But this openness and hospitality can be a result of temptation mechanisms, reification processes, and ideological optics of view on this problem. So, using a number of sociological studies of educational practices in the Kharkiv region and Ukraine, the authors rethink effects and results of the intensification of educational online practices. Online is interpreted as a temptation that generates both large groups of supporters and many opponents. The consequences of online practices, which always are interpreted non-problematically, are represented in the form of non-obvious challenges, which are often interpreted in sociological and administrative discourse as advantages and positive effects, however, as the researchers demonstrate, they carry implied dangers. Specifically, the authors explore several temptations: less effort, less engagement, mobilization of participants in the educational process, commodification of education, symbolic struggle over the quality of education, unification of education, reforms in education, privatization and liberalization, the formation of "attention economy". In this light, the authors isolate a number of dimensions and aspects of online education as a temptation, using the ideas of Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Zygmunt Bauman, Slavoj Žižek, George Ritzer, Terry Eagleton, and others. Separately, the article presents and discusses conclusions and prospects for further research on this issue.

Keywords: education, online, temptation, challenge, interpassivity, practices, academic autonomy.

Abstrakt: Artykuł poświęcony jest różnym aspektom wdrażania lekcji online we współczesnych systemach edukacji na przykładzie Ukrainy. Praktyki nauki online spotykają się z otwartą akceptacją i wdrażane są przez menedżerów oświaty, polityków, naukowców, wykładowców i studentów. Niemniej jednak ta otwartość i przyzwolenie mogą być wynikami działania mechanizmów pokusy, procesów reifikacyjnych i ideologicznej optyki skierowanej na omawiany problem. Tym samym, korzystając z analizy socjologicznych badań praktyk edukacyjnych w regionie charkowskim i na Ukrainie,

autorzy zastanawiają się nad skutkami nasilenia praktyk edukacyjnych prowadzonych w formie zdalnej. Nauka zdalna jest interpretowana jako pokusa, która ma zarówno licznych zwolenników, jak i wielu przeciwników. Konsekwencje praktyk internetowych, które są zawsze przedstawiane jako niegenerujące jakichkolwiek problemów, są w tekście interpretowane jako wyzwania, które w dyskursie socjologiczno-administracyjnym co prawda posiadają liczne zalety, a ich zastosowanie niesie pozytywne skutki. Jednakże, jak starają się wykazać autorzy, niosą ze sobą również zagrożenia. W szczególności badacze eksplorują szereg zagrożeń, takich jak mniejszy wysiłek, mniejsze zaangażowanie uczestników procesu edukacyjnego, „utowarowienie" edukacji, rozpoczęcie walki o symboliczną jakość edukacji, unifikację edukacji, próbę reformy, prywatyzacji i liberalizacji czy też formacji „ekonomii uwagi". W tym kontekście autorzy prezentują szereg wymiarów i aspektów edukacji zdalnej jako pokusy, wykorzystując idee takich badaczy jak Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Zygmunt Bauman, Slavoj Žižek, George Ritzer, Terry Eagleton i inni. W artykule przedstawiono i omówiono także wnioski oraz perspektywy dalszych badań nad prezentowanym zagadnieniem.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja, lekcje online, pokusa, wyzwanie, interpasywność, praktyki, autonomia akademicka.

Prerequisites of Research

The pan-/epidemic situation in which most contemporary countries, including Ukraine, have found themselves, has inspired a number of challenges, both in institutional and in group, both in structural and in practical terms. At the same time, some of these challenges look like prospects and chances. This illusion is facilitated by the mythologem of "crisis as a window of opportunity" common in society. One of these challenges is online in the broadest sense of the word. It can be online teaching and online learning, online communication and online services. Online penetrates social life institutionally, at the group level, at the level of individual communication, at the level of practices, at the level of values, or at the level of frames. One can already talk about the establishment of a sufficiently reproducible frame of an online lecture with the distribution of power in initially horizontal and flat landscape of a screen monitor. Online establishes itself at the level of expectations or norms, in the field of online technology or in the field of online economics, politics, or culture. The production of physical space and the rupture of social ties, communication, and involvement, erroneously referred to as "social distancing", generates completely new social, economic, and educational phenomena.

The analysis of all these processes can be carried out:

– globally, at the **mega-level**—with a comparison of the dynamics of online penetration in different countries, with a comparison of the development of the online economy in different regions, with an analysis of political strategies for building interaction by different states with online as a fundamentally new space, with their own legitimacy, identities, and the authorities;
– systemically, that is, at the **macro-level**, where online is analyzed as a factor in the existence of an integral social system, its functioning and structuring, its boundaries and internal coding, its sum of communication and interaction with the external environment;
– specialized, that is, at the **meso-level**, where we will talk about deformations and transformations of an institution of education, educational subsystems, frames and practices, expectations and roles;
– and, finally, **microsociologically**, that is, interactionally detecting frame changes or phenomenologically exploring changes in the horizons of relevance, constructivistically studying new objectivizations or (post)behavioristically classifying new acts of exchange or rational choice.

More important is that currently in sociology, from our point of view, there is an unsafe and rather flat consensus on the study of online problems in education. Firstly, online itself and its intrusion into the educational space is seen as something factual, reified, often even naturalized,

indisputable, necessary, and inevitable. Whereas the regularity and social unconditionality of this process should remain, from our point of view, in the focus of sociological comprehension until now (as it happens, for example, in philosophy (Agamben, 2011)). Secondly, the challenges that arise for education are investigated precisely as something dysfunctional and dangerous—and only as such. Negative effects of online education are studied only from the point of view of the structural consequences and structural perspectives (see, for example, Yaroshenko, 2019; Timoshenko, 2016; Efectyvnist', 2020; Osvita, 2020; Cherepanova, 2020; Smirnova, 2020). While the imperiousness and effectiveness of these challenges lie precisely in their ambivalent nature, not only as challenges but also as temptations, due to which these challenges, mimicking opportunities, and overshadowing the results already achieved by education system in their autonomous development, often by the hands of the subjects of the educational process themselves, destroy and heteronomize the field of education, speaking in the language of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 2015). Thirdly, there is practically no deconstruction of both the pan-/epidemic situation and the epiphenomena generated by it (quarantines, online education, "mask industry", "security paranoia", etc.).

That is why **the purpose** of this paper will identify challenges of online education as the temptations, opportunities, and threats on the macro- and micro-levels.

In this way, we will understand not only problems and challenges, but also their (re)production and support on mesolevel, level of groups, stereotypes, and expectations.

Temptation of Online and Online-temptations: Theoretical Framework

All participants of the educational process are exposed to online as a temptation, where the temptation is a whole range of conditions and contexts:

1. Reduction of required volumes of both intellectual and communicative effort that is superimposed on the powerful layer of "formal" motivation: up to 60% of students, according to the research of the Department of Sociology of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (see, for example, Ukrayins'ke, 2012; Arbenina, Sokuryans'ka, 2012), enter the university not with the motivation to "get knowledge", but with the motivation "to get a diploma."

2. A decrease in the required volume of involvement in the educational process, the emergence of the possibility of "combination" and "co-presence" in multiple online spaces. This leads to psychological economy on emotions in the learning process, to a refusal to engage back when such an opportunity arises, and to disintegration of the generational relay in science and education.

3. Mobilization of participants in the educational process in value, emotional, and practical dimensions due to the fact that classical universities are pandemically squeezed in a row with other providers of educational services. An Internet resource is heteronomously equated with a qualified teacher, a university with an educational portal (at best), which destroys academic identities, "invisible colleges", scientific schools, research durations and extensions, and ultimately reduces the cohesion of the academic field, 'attachment' and the involvement of academic subjects in the activities of their own universities and faculties, and leads to erosion of research and teaching teams. This, in turn, is superimposed on the high indicator of emigration sentiments (Golikov, Deyneko, 2012) among Ukrainian students, which turns this temptation into multiple and multifactorial.

4. Processes of redescription and reinterpretation of the understanding of the quality of education. When sociologists alarm the decline in the quality of education, according to many studies, they do not take into account the

fact that institutionally and structurally the education system in online environment continues to reproduce according to **changed, new** rules, according to which the growth of the otherwise described quality of education (often, of course, understood quantitatively, not qualitatively) and its "optimization" take place.

5. The intention of unifying all levels and dimensions of education in online practices. Of course, school and university education have fundamentally different problems: for example, schools are much less financially secure, much worse technically and methodically prepared for online eduction, much more interventionistically correlated with the spaces of the family because it is the family that turns out to be the "safety net" in relation to secondary education. So, there is a high dissatisfaction with school functioning in the quarantine conditions (27.4% of parents are not satisfied, 46% slightly satisfied, and 70% indicated that they have to constantly help children) (Rezul'tati, 2012), and the tension of families due to the transfer of a considerable part of the weight of educational time and practice in the family space[1]. Namely online training on focus groups with representatives of Kharkiv families of different types have been listed as the most important issue of families with school children, along with teachers' "indifference" (which we, rather, inclined to interpret as fatigue in transforming conditions and lack of emotional and social "feedback" of pedagogical work in the new education system) (Suchasna, 2020). Quantitative research[2] shows

similar phenomena: only about a third of the respondents support distance learning (Osvita, 2020). However, at the same time, social "reaction" to such different online challenges for secondary and higher education does not allow us to say that there has been an essential distinction between these challenges for different levels and stages. Moreover, all contemporary webinars, methodological seminars, and "distance education centers" portals are often poorly specified to reach and improve cost-effectiveness.

6. Constant educational reforms that turn a rather serious challenge of onlinization of education into one of the moments of reform. Not only does the shift in the status-role system of the relationship between students and teachers, pupils and tutors continue in this context, but the system of priorities and values is also being rebuilt. And although this is described and conceptualized by many researchers as reorientation of education towards practice, reducing the burden on schoolchildren, abandoning high theory, abandoning useless courses and so on, however, this "side of temptation" in this challenge is intensified by online, which is also able to carry out further interruption of academic autonomy, destruction of epistemological independence, and social responsibility.

7. Neoliberalization and privatization of the social, continuing in Ukrainian conditions of world-system's periphery. If in the countries of the core and semi-periphery these processes are already beginning to cause harsh answers and, in any case, are provided with deep academic reflection (Sardoc, 2021; Lipton, 2020; Clack, Paule, 2019), then in Ukrainian conditions these processes are often considered or implied as a panacea for important social and

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[1]   Within the framework of the study "Modern Kharkiv Family in the Sociological Dimension", carried out on the instructions of the Department of Family, Youth and Sports of the Kharkiv City Council, a total of 4 focus groups were held: 2—with representatives of so-called ordinary families, 1—with representatives of families with many children, 1—with representatives of families with difficult life circumstances.

[2]   Implemented by the Sociological service of the Razumkov Center jointly with the Fund "Democratic

Initiative" in July 2020; on a representative sample it was surveyed 2.022 respondents in all regions of Ukraine with the exception of the territories beyond the control of Ukrainian government (Crimea, parts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions).

educational problems or even prescribed as necessary. In particular, the neoliberal strategy of privatizing profits and socializing losses leads to the transfer of risks to teachers and students (for example, technical support of the process), discoursed as temptation of polyarchization and polycentration, individualization and flexibilization of education, places responsibility for educational communication and institutionalization on participants of the process.

8. The commodification of attention and time in general (see in more detail: Golikov, Tyaglo, 2021), which turns direct "live" communication between students/schoolchildren and teachers/lecturers into an object of quantification, exploitation, objectification, and tariffication. Emotional, human, subjective factors are suppressed and excluded, the alienation of education is growing, which is seductively conceptualized as equality of chances as the creation of conditions for flexible education, as the creation of controlled and transparent educational space. At the same time, as research shows, both students and teachers categorically lack communication and direct contact.

Praxis of Online Education: Meeting Challenges and Temptations

It is not surprising in such conditions and contexts that with a fairly optimistic official discourse of online education, with an avalanche-like increase in promotions and events aimed at introducing and deepening online techniques and online practices, we observe a persistently negative attitude of both students and teachers towards online education. So, the poll[3] of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv

National University students showed that among the problems of distance education respondents often indicated poor Internet connection (56%), heavy workload (42%), deterioration of health (40%), difficulties in motivating during online classes (31%), limited communication with teachers (16%), etc. It turned out that this also affects the structure of free time (walks around the city and communication with friends offline suffered most), but at the same time, almost every fifth indicated that they devoted less time to studying at the university than before the pandemic.

If we exclude purely technical aspects of the problems indicated by the students, it turns out that even in such a relatively small and specific sample we find the problems indicated by Giorgio Agamben (2020), namely "the end of communality as a form of life," the destruction of the associations of universities, the disintegration of the academic way of life, the destruction of social environment and sociocultural space of the academy and students, finally, even damage to cities for which the university was the center of the structuring and procedurality of social life. That is why the temptation of online, which is so effective for managers, administrators, politicians, or salespeople from education, causes horror, in the language of Italian scientist Nuccio Ordine (2020) who compares distance education technique with a Trojan horse, with the help of which, in the context of the pandemic, occurs "a breakthrough through the last bastions of private life and education".

It is in these contexts of background and habitualized, practical, and structural resistance that online intensification takes place. Such a paradoxical opposition can be explained precisely by the ambivalent nature of the perception and practice of the online in the conditions of the education system—as a challenge and as a temptation.

Purely analytically, we can isolate a number of dimensions and aspects of online education as a temptation:

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[3] November–December 2020, held by the Center for Social and Humanitarian Education of the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University; online survey of 2.316 students of II–IV courses.

1. Connectedness and onlinization as mechanization in contrasting communicative (based on the antithesis of Jürgen Habermas (1987)). The technical is seductive as more reliable, more representative, more stable, more authoritative, and more effective. However, relying precisely on the indicated antithesis, the technical leaves no space and no place for the deployment of the human or for the contingency (Luhmann, 2006).

2. Internetization as vulgarization and profanation, discoursed as democratization and simplification of access, which in fact turns out to be a flattening of the social and all its complexity. A museum or lecture, religious rite or artistic contemplation raises fundamentally new questions of the possibility of inclusion and involvement in context of the Internet. A subspecies of this temptation of democratization also turns out to be temptation by the simplicity of the technical, which is antonymic to the complexity of the social—and to be the dangerous entropy of culture, which has been repeatedly discussed in modern scientific and journalistic literature.

3. Formal and external relativization and pluralization which are a variation of the temptation described above. However, this temptation creates a risk of destruction of the very constitution and nature of education, especially of higher education as combined with science. But the ontology of plurality, the truth of plurality and plurality of truth, the reality of plurality and plurality of reality at the moment are not only resolved issues in philosophy and science, but also not posed properly. In this sense, the relativization and pluralization of education (especially intensified, as we have shown above, in the context of the destruction of the structure of authority in online education) turn out to be built on a missing foundation.

4. Visualization and entertainment of education generated by distance and online learning. In the Internet environment, this process is aggravated: it also turns out to be a "competition" of the teacher's attractiveness with an infinite set of possibilities for the attractiveness of the Internet—a competition that the teacher will inevitably lose, because didactic and specialized, scientific and academic knowledge material has a fundamentally different plasticity from the point of view of visualization and entertainment, in comparison with the overwhelming majority of knowledge materials on the Internet. Its attractiveness is much less "elastic" in the language of economic theory. This also turns out to be a "competition" of the teacher's competency with competencies of an infinite number of information sources on the Internet, at least one of which is enough to be more authoritative, accurate, or extensive (that is statistically almost inevitable) than the teacher in order to bring down the structure of teaching as a direct interaction of the teacher and student as well as the systematics of order and power behind this teaching. This multiplies already mentioned relativism and pluralism, and also, which is especially tragic for classical education, turns the temple of science into a background practice. The seductiveness of this tendency is most empirically and clearly manifested in the substitution of the teacher with presentations, which only multiplies the temptation by visualization and finally deprives education of its autonomy, drawing it into a competition according to the rules of the visuality of the Internet.

5. Passivation of education. Internet acts as a temptation to passivity, in which silent wall of avatars replaces the live audience—and as a temptation to interpassivity (defined in the literature as "deficite of enjoying authentic experiences" (Žižek, 2005). Recalling that interpassivity is a phenomenon which manifests itself in the delegating somebody's own actions and feelings to the somebody or something outside—people or objects, including "the delegation of pleasure" and externalization of

fantasies. Interpassivity, let us clarify again, is, first of all, not "deprivation", but the preservation of connection with external incarnations, with objectifications. It is the transformation of someone or something into a representative or translator of one's own interest. "Reposting" on one's wall a series of articles is equated by such "students" to effective and efficient mastering, downloading a video lecture—to being on its acting, copying files from a flash drive or Google disk—to familiarization and participation. As Žižek clarifies this in the title of his monograph, we have a way "to enjoy through the Other," to feel a "delegated enjoyment". And the most dangerous thing that the Other is being replaced with are all elements that deepen the abyss of students' inactivity. And the fundamental multiplication of educational products (lectures, readers, or texts) creates a temptation for deepening passivity. Also, it creates teachers who once created the required amount of educational products and are faced with an implicit proposal to stop there.

6. The temptation of (formal) democracy and (technical) equality. Evidently manifested formal and technical aspects obscure the essential inequality, which thereby also actually gets the opportunity to deepen and latentize, naturalize and reify. Starting from the fact that offline does not just disappear, but turns into a luxury (Bowles, 2019), offline education is transformed into another attribute of status and consumption, class difference, and sociocultural inequalities; and ending with the fact that technical and formal equality asserts and reinforces essential inequality: after all, a teacher, like another specialist, *knows in advance* what to look for, while a student, being at a distance of the same number of clicks from the necessary information, does not know this in advance. As a result, online democracy turns out to be (self-)deception.

7. The temptation of formalities and the speed of changes about which we have met a considerable number of diverse reflections and studies. Even leaving the issue of fetishizing change itself (for the sake of change?), it is worth noting several important temptations that are produced differently than they are represented. Namely:
   a) the equating of the changes' form and the changes' essence; the form of transformation is not really equal to the transformation of nature;
   b) the equating of speed and goal: dynamics is presented as an end in itself, while in fact dynamics should be an instrument, and, as in any movement, the measure of this dynamics should determine its variation;
   c) the equating of change and the meaning of education, while essentially the opposite is true: education is precisely the place and conveyor for the preservation of authenticity and identity; the last point in general calls into question the very conveyor of changes and reforms as contradicting the essence and nature of education.

8. The temptation of internationalization, for which, of course, the Internet is not only an emblem, but also the most relevant and comfortable environment for the development and existence of this phenomenon. Whereas internationalization, far from guaranteeing in fact what it promised (efficiency, dynamism of development, KPI, etc.), is guaranteed to come into conflict with existing (but localized) public goods, such as the ability of education to make civic identity, local role, and the functions of educational and some another important institutions, but often conflicting with internationalization (which, of course, also requires its resources, attention, and efforts) features and phenomena.

9. The temptation by McDonaldization (quite like the ideas of George Ritzer (see Ritzer, 1993; Carrol 2013) where one of the examples is the technique of evaluation, which is actively discussed in sociological and administrative

discourse. Even leaving out of our attention the philosophical questions of the possibility of "proving harmony with algebra," we will only point out an extensive and sharp criticism of those criteria and features that are laid down in the modern evaluation of science and education—criticism that is well metaphorized by the terms "scopusization" and "hirschization". Another important aspect of this risk is the temptation to reduce scientific activity to projects. They are well taken into account, calculated, evaluated, and planned; projects are rationally compared and described in a technical and bureaucratic manner; projects, finally, form "trajectories" (note that these words are deeply rooted, prophetically going back to the ancient *jacere* meaning "to throw", "to fling out", or "to emit") that are well fit into the logic of "philistines sitting in the chairs of administrators" (Eagleton, 2015).

10. In the final and ultimatum, online appears as a temptation to infinity:

a) the infinity of labor and the destruction of everyday life, intimacy, and leisure for students and teachers, etc.;

b) the infinity of possibilities and the destruction of the selectivity (see Zygmunt Bauman's ideas about the problems of postmodernism as a lack of selection mechanisms (Bauman, 1993));

c) the infinity of diversity which turns the participants in the academic process into Hawthorne experimental subjects who are doomed to constant "improvements" as a result of constant "reforms" and "experiments";

d) infinity of copying: so, Byelorussian sociologist Larisa Filinskaya cites the data showing that Byelorusian students are more optimistic than teachers, saying that the online space can contain much more information on every form of work; naturally, the younger generations of the academic community are primarily susceptible to this temptation of the endlessness of copying;

e) infinity of communication which is also essentially contradictory: students need chat and audio (as freedom from monitoring attendance), and teachers need "video" (as feedback) and "attendance" (as one of guarantees of the meaning of their work).

Discussing Perspectives and Perspectiving Discussions

It is worth noting that other researchers in post-Soviet and more global contexts come to similar conclusions based on more or less empirically based research. So, Kateryna Danilovich (2021), a specialist in online education, states similar disadvantages of distance education (namely, a lack of socialization, technological fetishism, demotivation for learning, and the problematic nature of the practical aspects of learning). Olga Kolomiets and Tatiana Litvinova (2020) found problems and opportunities of online education similar to our research results on their own research of online practices in medical education, noting both the unpreparedness of universities and teachers, which manifested itself in the decline in the quality of education, and the emergence of problems in the practical training of future doctors. Svitlana Solyanik (2021) adds to this analysis such a variable as the general culture of using digital technologies in society, government, and business as well as the social order from society and the economy.

Summing up the above, we would like to emphasize some **conclusions**, although the list of risk temptations presented by us is not complete and final. As one can see, we have not even tried to typologize them yet. However, from our point of view, the very understanding of them as temptations is an important step. In particular, because of the fact in modern sociology such an alarming, suspicious tone has not been adopted in relation to these phenomena—and we think it's important to change them back.

We are aware that our analysis can be designated by someone as "conservatism", "unwillingness to change," and "obscurantism". Yet, the fact that epistemologically such complex and important concepts as the idea of the autonomy of the field of education (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 2015) or the model of (self-)production and autopoiesis of the system (Luhmann, 2006) will be on our side makes us still look at the results of our analysis optimistically. After all, it demonstrates that the advantages of distance education, its urgent and intensive introduction into system of education, generates not only opportunities (and, perhaps, not even so much), but risks that are naturalized and represented as temptations. Being exactly temptations, they carry in dangers to the system itself. On the other side of them, there may be systemic crises in education (a decline in the quality of education, depersonalization, alienation, the growth of ignorance, the gap between generations, and the destruction of scientific schools) and that is why, first of all, it is necessary to understand whether the discourse of the "new normality" is really a relevant reflection of the objective the situation or the implementation of power strategies; whether the shift towards Homo Retis (Zakablukovsky, Kuchinov, 2017) and the "wardrobe of identities" (Bauman, 2000) is really significant and essential; whether online education really is the mainstream and necessary way to solve emerging and pressing problems. And here sociologists can participate both as academic figures and as teachers-practitioners—the main thing is that this cannot be done without an attentive, critical, and suspicious look.

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