


Liudmyla Iuzva

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1448-5478>

 luydmilay@gmail.com

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND RETURN TO SCHOOLS IN THE MINDS OF UKRAINIAN SCHOOLCHILDREN: A BRIEF REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

ZDALNA EDUKACJA I POWRÓT DO SZKOŁY W OPINII UKRAIŃSKICH UCZNIÓW: KRÓTKIE SPRAWOZDANIE Z BADAŃ

DOI: 10.24917/ycee.2021.12.24-33

Abstract:

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, many social systems have been shaken. Among them is education system. Over the past two years, much research has focused on the problems of the pandemic period which have arisen both in educators and students. However, there is still no comprehensive understanding of them. The NAWA-funded project "Identifying Barriers to Ukrainian and Polish Students Returning to School" has led to a representative study of distance education among Ukrainian schoolchildren. The research was constructed on a classical sociological methodology based on computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI). The aim was to identify problems of distance education and barriers that could prevent schoolchildren from returning to the classical form of education (both social and mental health). One of them was the fatigue of distance learning and the difficulty of perceiving educational material through the screen. The results of the study also showed different types of inequalities in access to educational services, their quality, and so on.

Keywords:

school education, schoolchildren, distance learning, COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine.

Abstrakt:

W wyniku pandemii koronawirusa wiele systemów społecznych zostało wyprowadzonych z równowagi. Wśród nich znalazł się system edukacji. W ciągu ostatnich dwóch lat wiele badań koncentrowało się na problemach funkcjonowania zdalnej edukacji w czasie pandemii. Badania realizowano zarówno wśród nauczycieli, jak i uczniów. Jednak nadal nie ma pełnej wiedzy na temat skutków zdalnej edukacji. W ramach finansowanego przez NAWA projektu „Identyfikacja barier powrotu do szkoły wśród ukraińskich i polskich uczniów” przeprowadzono reprezentatywne badanie zdalnego nauczania wśród ukraińskich uczniów. Badanie zostało skonstruowane w oparciu o klasyczną metodologię socjologiczną opartą na wspomaganych komputerowo wywiadach osobistych (CAPI). Celem było zidentyfikowanie problemów nauczania online oraz barier, które mogą uniemożliwiać uczniom powrót do tradycyjnej formy edukacji (kondycja społeczna, psychiczna). Konsekwencjami zdalnej edukacji były np. zmęczenie nauką na odległość i trudność w odbiorze materiałów edukacyjnych w trakcie lekcji online. Wyniki badania wykazały również różnego rodzaju nierówności w dostępie do zdalnej edukacji i jej jakości.

Słowa kluczowe:

edukacja szkolna, uczniowie, zdalna edukacja, pandemia COVID-19, Ukraina.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged most societal systems. It probably mostly influenced medical system and education system. According to CEDOS, the transition to distance learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a deterioration in the quality and accessibility of education, as well as to exacerbating a number of educational inequalities. At the beginning of the pandemic, 90% of schools around the world were closed. In the spring of 2020, all educational institutions in Ukraine switched to distance learning. A few months later, an “adaptive quarantine” was introduced in Ukraine, which provided for the division of Ukraine into zones of epidemiological security: green, yellow, orange, and red. Accordingly, general secondary education institutions constantly switched from distance to blended learning and vice versa, while higher education institutions mostly remained at distance learning (Nazarenko, Polishchuk, 2021). During the pandemic period, Ukrainian scholars, as well as scholars around the world, have conducted much research devoted to educational issues (Osvita i pandemiia, 2020; Yeremenko, 2020; Otsinka stavlennia do problemy koronavirusu Covid-19 ta karantynnykh zakhodiv, 2020; Długosz et al., 2020). One of the largest and one dedicated to the remote period and children is the project “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Daily Childhood Practices” (Polek, Sanina, Sobol’, 2021). It is important to remember that such turbulence has become commonplace for schoolchildren, the vast majority of whom are at a very young age. It has strongly affected both their perception of education in general and their mental health. Under such conditions, the understanding of how to make the readaptation of schoolchildren to the classical offline education system non-traumatic became especially important. This task has been performed within the framework of the project funded by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange titled “Identification of Barriers Hindering Ukrainian and Polish Schoolchildren’s Return

to Schools” (Intervention Grants Programme, BPN/GIN/2021/1/00012/U/00001).

Research Methodology

The research was based on various research questions which concerned problems of distance learning period and returning to school. Some of them will be disclosed in this article:

- Which problems did schoolchildren have with distance learning?
- What are the main barriers to studying during distance learning?

To achieve intended research goals, the best method is the implementation of a survey conducted according to the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) methodology. The proposed research method allows the respondent to contact a qualified interviewer who ensures that the entire questionnaire is completed and encourages the respondent to provide thoughtful answers. Thanks to this method, the computer system verifies correctness of entered data and guarantees quick preparation of a report and statistical analysis of obtained results. This method also allows for the presentation of multimedia content and enables the extension of the scope of research compared to traditional methods of opinion research. Undoubtedly, it is a method that guarantees high accuracy and reliability of variable measurements. At the same time, it allows for quick collection of data ready for analysis.

What is very important, the survey methodology enables testing of a representative sample of older and younger schoolchildren from all over the territory of two countries (Poland and Ukraine). Thanks to the randomly selected sample, taking into account criteria such as social status, gender, or place of residence, we were finally able to find out about problems faced by all social classes and income groups. This method also made it possible to conduct interviews at the respondents’ homes, which is conducive to reporting problems and greater reflection and

gives an interviewer the opportunity to assess the situation during the research.

So, from August 15 to 27, 2021, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) conducted an all-Ukrainian survey of schoolchildren. Computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) interviewed 1,022 respondents living in 78 settlements in all regions of Ukraine (except the Autonomous Republic of Crimea) in a stochastic sample, representative of quotas for the region and region of residence, type of settlement, sex, and age. In Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, surveys were conducted only in the territories controlled by Ukraine. Statistical sampling error—with a probability of 0.95 and a design effect of 1.1. Analysis of the data was carried out using SPSS.

Research Results

1. Technical Conditions for Online Education

Ukrainian schoolchildren stated that they have their own desk for school assignments (86%) and constant access to the Internet (81%). Also, a significant proportion of schoolchildren have

laptops (61%) and a room where they can study (61%). A large proportion of Ukrainian families still have a desktop PC (41%). Among the devices that may be (or are) useful in the learning process at home, respondents rarely indicated a printer (18%) and a scanner (6%).

2. Assessment of the Quality of Classes

In fact, for the first time, Ukrainian schoolchildren had a long systematic experience of participating in distance learning. Comparing traditional school lessons in classrooms and distance lessons, schoolchildren often noted that online lessons were uninteresting and of poor quality (43%) or were the same as lessons in classes? (34%).

3. The Pros and Cons of Online Education

The research focused on the study of the pros and cons of distance education. Among the main advantages of distance education, Ukrainian schoolchildren listed:

- 75% agree that the lack of need to get together or go to school was positive, and that there

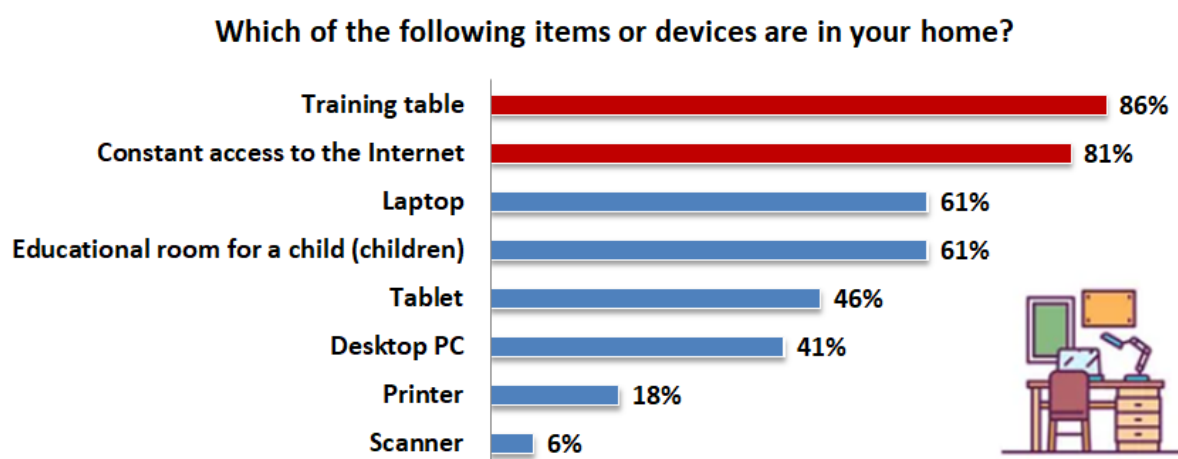


Figure 1. The items or devices which respondents have in their home

Source: constructed by the author on research data

Online lessons, compared to traditional school lessons, were...

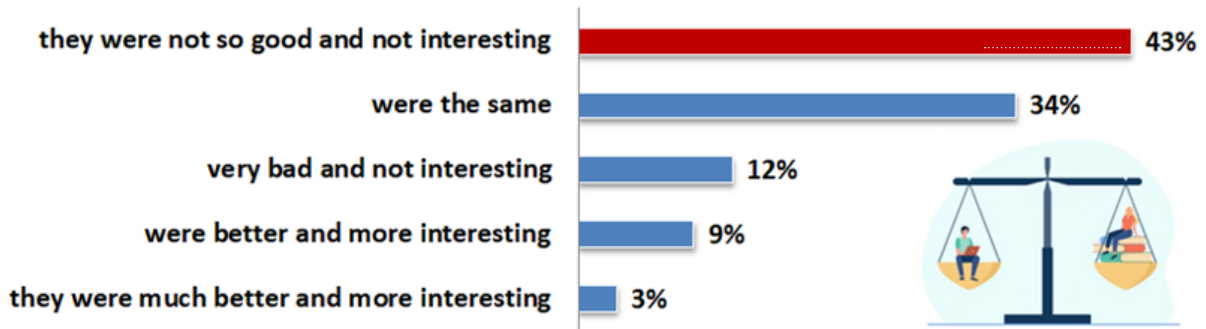


Figure 2. Comparing online lessons and traditional school lessons

Source: constructed by the author on research data

- was more free time (37% completely agree and 33% rather agree);
- 70% agree that the positive thing was the opportunity to sleep more and that there was no need to hurry anywhere (37% completely agree and 33%—rather agree);
- 67% agree that the positive thing was that distance learning is safer because it protects against the danger of getting COVID-19 (32% completely agree and 35% rather agree);
- 59% agree that the positive thing was that during distance learning they could use the help of parents and siblings (22% completely agree and 37% rather agree);
- 52% agree that the positive thing was that during distance learning they had fewer learning responsibilities (17% completely agree and 35% rather agree);
- 48% agree that the positive thing was that due to distance learning they had more time for

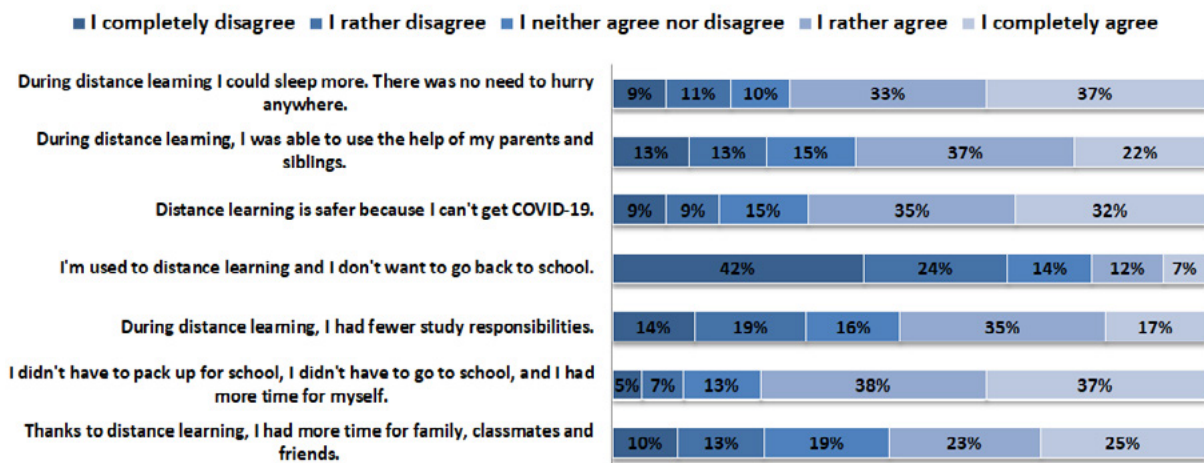


Figure 3. The pros of online education

Source: constructed by the author on research data

families, classmates, and friends (25% completely agree and 23% rather agree).

The researchers asked schoolchildren to express their views on hypothetical shortcomings of distance education. Some of them were indeed assessed as shortcomings, others—not. Thus, among the main disadvantages of distance education, Ukrainian schoolchildren called:

- 65% of schoolchildren agree that during distance learning their relationship with teachers deteriorated (29% completely agree and 36% rather agree);
- 54% of schoolchildren agree that during distance learning their relationships with classmates deteriorated (18% completely agree and 36% rather agree);
- 53% of schoolchildren agree that during distance learning they could not fully participate in online lessons due to health problems (17% completely agree and 36% rather agree);
- only 19% agree that they are used to distance learning and do not want to go back to school (7% completely agree and 12% rather agree).

However, the schoolchildren did not agree with other disadvantages that could be inherent in the period of distance education:

- 61% of schoolchildren do not agree that during distance learning they were physically and morally exhausted (33% completely disagree and 28% rather disagree);
- 70% of schoolchildren do not agree that during distance learning other schoolchildren listened to what they said, and this confused them (38% completely disagree and 32% rather disagree);
- 77% of schoolchildren do not agree that during distance learning they spent too much time using a computer/laptop/tablet (44% completely disagree and 33% rather disagree);
- 74% of schoolchildren do not agree that during distance learning they could not fully understand the material of online lessons (45% completely disagree and 29% rather disagree);
- 82% of schoolchildren disagree that during online lessons it was difficult for them to focus on what teachers were saying (59% completely disagree and 23% rather disagree).

4. Level of Engagement in Online Education

In general, 51% of schoolchildren rated the experience of distance education as negative and 40%

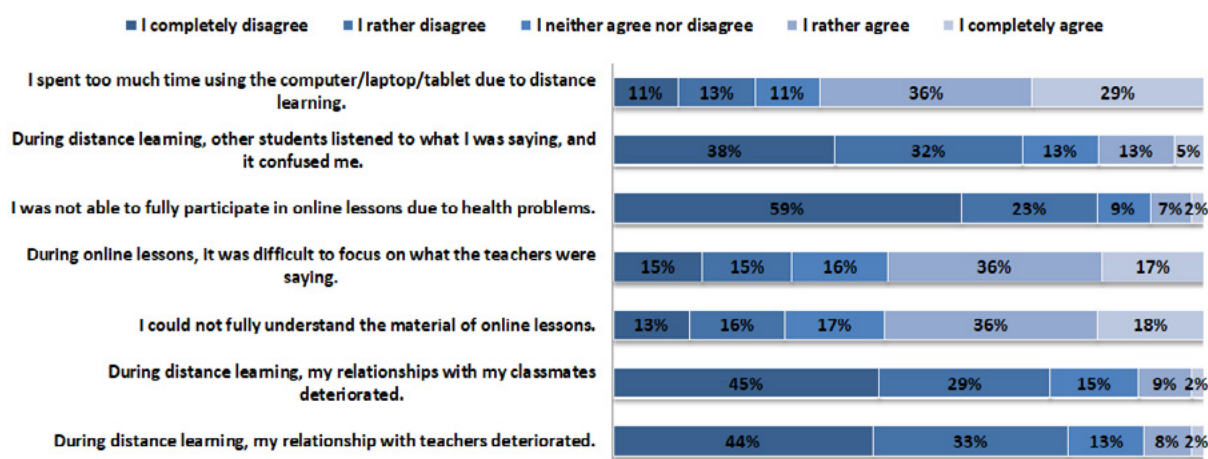


Figure 4. The cons of online education

Source: constructed by the author on research data

Distance learning in 2021 as for me...

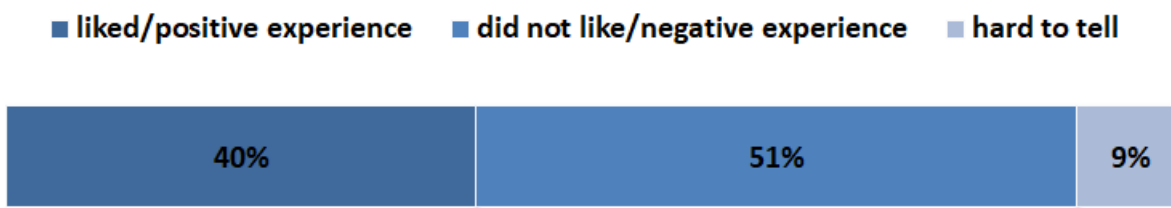


Figure 5. Assessment of distance education by respondents

Source: constructed by the author on research data

as positive. 9% of schoolchildren found it difficult to determine their assessment. It is noteworthy that the gap between negative and positive assessments is not too large. In national surveys, the percentage of those who negatively evaluate distance education is usually higher. Thus, in the Active Group survey, 40.3% of Ukrainians said that they had a negative attitude towards distance education and 17% said it was rather negative (Yeremenko, 2020). In the New Image Marketing Group survey, 30% of surveyed Ukrainians have a negative attitude towards distance learning and

another 37% rate it rather negatively (Otsinka stavlennia do problemy koronavirusu, 2020, p. 23).

Also, 59% of schoolchildren confirmed that they take into account the equipment of their house/apartment with a computer, laptop, and the quality of the Internet. In the vast majority of cases they allowed the respondents to completely fulfill their learning responsibilities during distance learning. 27% of schoolchildren said that they allowed it faster, i.e., majority of the respondents confirmed the possibility of performing school duties during the distance period of education.

Given that your home/apartment had/did not have a computer, laptop and a certain quality of the Internet, did this allow you to fulfill your learning responsibilities during distance learning?

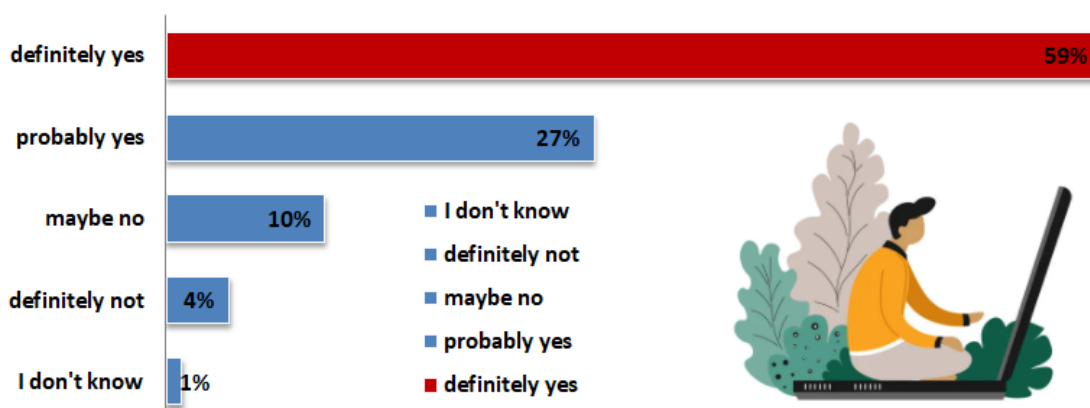


Figure 6. Fulfilling learning responsibilities during distance period of studying

Source: constructed by the author on research data

5. Attendance at Online Classes and Reasons for Absenteeism

Most of schoolchildren in the study indicated that they attended all online lessons (47%) and most online lessons (41%). Only 3% of schoolchildren found it difficult to attend online lessons and 9% attended only some of them.

The most common reasons for skipping online lessons were that some lessons were uninteresting (16%), that the students were tired of distance learning (13%), and that they were sick (11%).

Schoolchildren who entered their individual answer to the question about the reasons for skipping online lessons often pointed to poor Internet connection, the fact that teachers did not

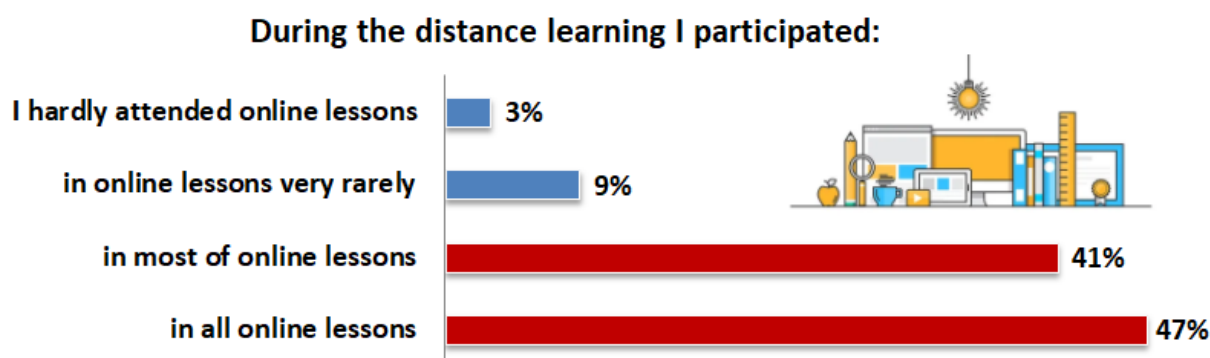


Figure 7. Participating in online lessons during distance period of studying

Source: constructed by the author on research data

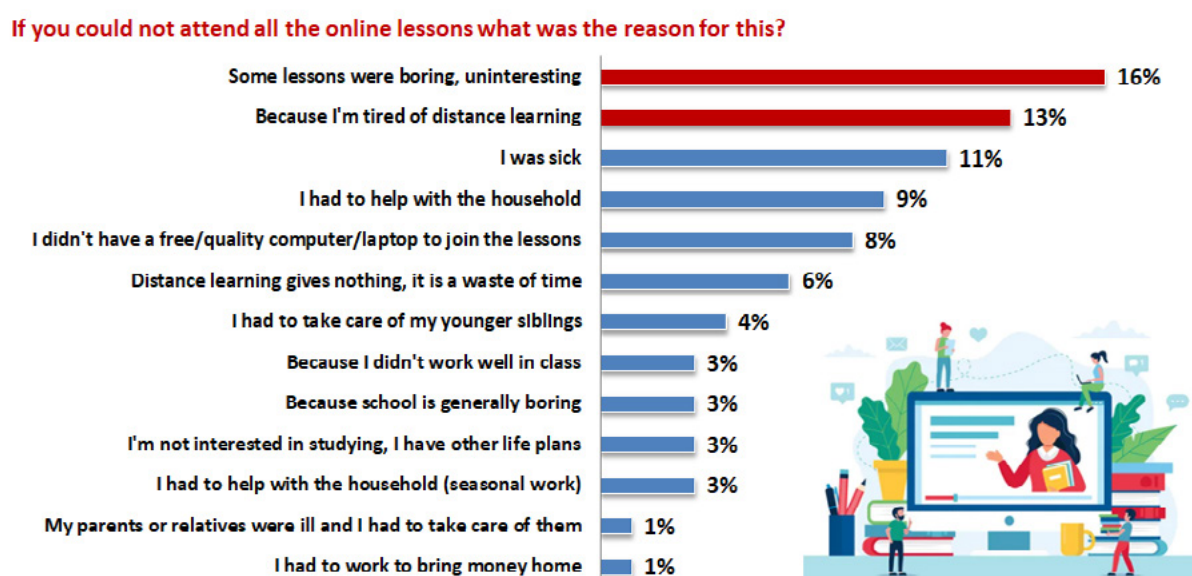


Figure 8. Reasons for non-attendance of online lessons during distance period of studying

Source: constructed by the author on research data

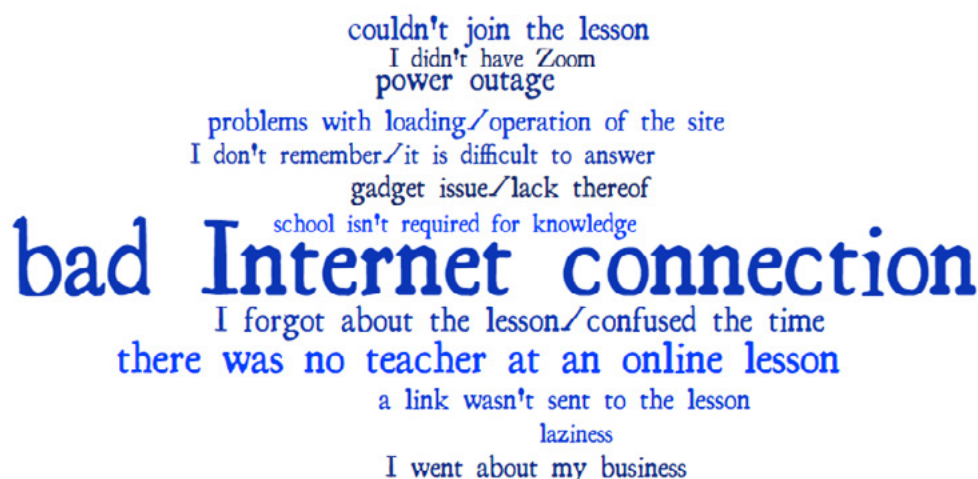


Figure 9. Reasons for non-attendance of online lessons during distance period of studying (open question)

Instrument: WordItOut (<https://worditout.com/>)

Source: constructed by the author on research data

conduct lessons, various problems with joining online lessons (untimely sent links, passwords, etc.), and turning off the lights in the areas of residence.

distance education. 35% of schoolchildren indicated that the desire to return to school is the same as the distance learning experience. 12% of schoolchildren said that their desire to return to school decreased.

6. Willingness to Go Back to School

Schoolchildren note that their desire to return to normal schooling (i.e., in classrooms) is much greater (50%) after their staying at home and

Discussion and Conclusions

First of all, it should be emphasized that Ukrainian schoolchildren have entered the period of

After a break caused by distance education and long training at home, my desire to return to normal education in the classroom with teachers may be described as:

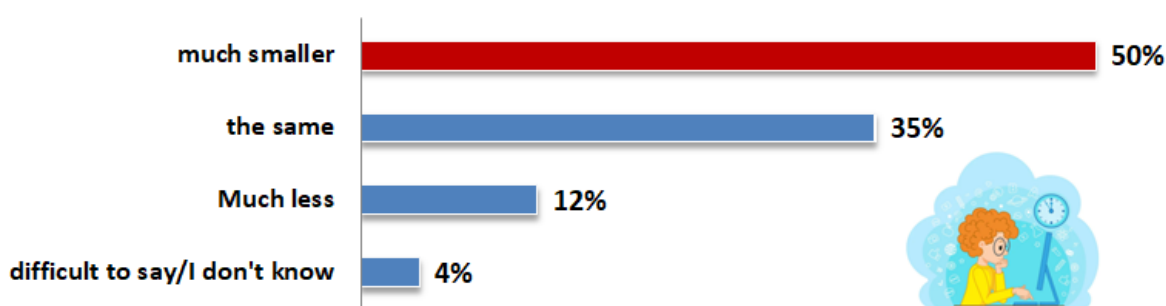


Figure 10. Schoolchildren's desire to return to offline education

Source: constructed by the author on research data

distance education having unequal opportunities. Serhii Horbachov, the Educational Ombudsman, notes that the quality of education is directly related to access to it, the organization of distance learning, and the ability of schoolchildren to acquire knowledge and acquire in general. He states that, unfortunately, for schoolchildren, especially general secondary education, inequality of access to education in Ukraine, and the world during the pandemic only worsened (Horbachov, 2021). However, most of the schoolchildren who took part in the study stated that they had their own desk and Internet access as well as a laptop and a room. One of the important reasons that created inequality was access (constant) to high-quality high-speed Internet. Among the reasons for the absence during distance lessons, in the open question schoolchildren most often pointed out problems with the Internet connection. A methodological feature of the study was that the alternatives did not include a smartphone as a tool to use during online classes. This seems to be a disadvantage of constructing the question because a significant number of Ukrainian schoolchildren studied through smartphones. Given the small size of the screen and the specifics of consuming information from a smartphone, it should be noted that this is also a kind of inequality compared to those schoolchildren who consumed information from a computer screen.

More than half of Ukrainian schoolchildren said that they consider the experience of distance education negative and online lessons uninteresting. Such data are confirmed by other sociological studies on schoolchildren (Markovska, 2021). This is often due to the fact that the world is becoming increasingly digital, which is happening too fast. Alvin Toffler described how technology affects social life and introduced the concept of futuroshock. That is, when under the influence of technology there are too many changes in too short time, people do not have time to adapt and are shocked (Makarenko, 2021). This is exactly the kind of futuroshock experienced by the

participants of the educational process with the beginning of the pandemic.

Most of the schoolchildren indicated that during distance learning they managed to achieve their learning goals and almost half of them participated in online lessons. Global research confirms the correlation between class absences and performance (García, Weiss, 2020). In the study, schoolchildren also indicated that they assess the level of their knowledge obtained in online and offline periods approximately the same. However, the International Education Quality Survey PISA, coordinated by the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), showed that, for example, the average level of mathematical literacy of Ukrainian schoolchildren corresponds to the second level (453 points). 36% of Ukrainian schoolchildren failed to demonstrate such a level and 15.6% of them did not even reach the first level of mathematical literacy (Bakhrushyn, 2019). Distance education only worsened the level of knowledge of Ukrainian schoolchildren (26.1% of respondents in a representative sociological survey indicated this as a problem of offline education) (Osvita i pandemiia, 2020).

Among the biggest advantages of distance education, children mentioned that it was possible to sleep longer and there was no need to hurry anywhere; no need to pack a school backpack, you could save time for yourself; distance education allowed to be safe and not to be infected with COVID-19. These positive effects are questionable as they are directly related to their negative consequences—the destruction of the school day when children woke up at different times on different days. As for security, they were often in many other public spaces without attending school. However, these effects were still called positive by the student children. The same data were obtained in the project “Children’s Geographies” (Polek, Sanina, Sobol’, 2021, p. 40).

The biggest downside was that they spent too much time in front of computer screens and

using other gadgets during distance learning. Two other shortcomings pointed out by a significant proportion of schoolchildren show that there were difficulties in perceiving the material online and understanding it. These shortcomings intersect with mental health issues. According to a UNICEF report, about 43% of children suffer from disorders such as anxiety and depression (On my mind, 2021, p. 18).

Thus, it can be concluded that the main difficulties in returning to ordinary school life and education lie in the areas of inequality and mental health. The children have been in different learning conditions for a long time. Often, the problems of perception, control of the children's practices and emotions lie solely with parents who also suffered from the futuroshock of the pandemic period. The state did not respond effectively to the challenge at the schoolchildren's level.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the head of project dr hab. prof. UP Piotr Długosz (The Pedagogical University of Krakow) for working on the research methodology and support at all stages of the research.

Bibliography

- Bakhrushyn, V. (2019). *Matematyka u PISA-2018: rezultaty i vysnovky*. Nova Ukrainska shkola. Obtained from: <https://nus.org.ua/articles/matematyka-u-pisa-2018-rezultaty-i-vysnovky/> (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- Długosz, P., Kryvachuk, L., Shyyan, O. (2020). *Social practices in the covid-19 Pandemic among Polish and ukrainian youth*. Lublin: Academicon. <https://doi.org/10.52097/acapress.9788362475582> (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- García, E., Weiss, E. (2020). *COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy: Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding*. Economic Policy Institute. Obtained from: <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-relief-recovery-and-rebuilding/#> (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- Horbachov, S. (2021). *Nerivnyi dostup do osvity pid chas pandemii: vyklyky sohodennia*. Superviziia v NUSh. Obtained from: <http://barna-consult.com/nerivnyj-dostup-do-osvity-pid-chas-pandemii-vyklyky-sogodennya/?fbclid=IwAR2l6Ws1JYIbUQ6x7gGYMQWX-4PjalWvxz-AZyQHMYx4TshBIBWHB8CwpKBU> (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- Makarenko, O. (2021). *Yak dystantsiine navchannia zminylo osvitu y shcho bude dali* (2021). Nova Ukrainska shkola. Obtained from: <https://nus.org.ua/articles/yak-dystantsijne-navchannia-zminylo-osvitu-j-shho-bude-dali/> (retrieved 22.11.2021).
- Markovska, M. (2021). *Yak ukrainski dity prozhyvaly karantyn*. Nova ukrainska shkola. Obtained from: <https://nus.org.ua/articles/yak-ukrayinski-dity-prozhyvaly-karantyn-tsikavi-fakty-j-11-porad-iz-doslidzheniya/> (retrieved 27.11.2021).
- Nazarenko, Yu., Polishchuk, O. (2021). *Osvita v umovakh pandemii u 2020/2021 rotsi: analiz problem i naslidkiv*. CEDOS. Obtained from: <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/osvita-v-umovah-pandemii-analiz-problem-i-naslidkiv/> (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- On my mind: promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. (2021). United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Obtained from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/108036/file/SOWC-2021-executive-summary.pdf> (retrieved 27.11.2021).
- Osvita i pandemiia: shcho ukrainsi dumaiut pro dystantsiine navchannia ta yak ostiniuiut ZNO*. (2020). Fond «Demokratychni initsiatyvy» im. Ilka Kucheriva. Obtained from: <https://dif.org.ua/article/osvita-i-pandemiiya-shcho-ukrainsi-dumaiut-pro-dystantsiine-navchannia-ta-yak-otsinyuyut-zno> (retrieved 27.11.2021).
- Otsinka stavlennia do problemy koronavirusu Covid-19 ta karantynnykh zakhodiv*. (2020). New Image Marketing Group. Obtained from: https://newimage.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Do%97%Do%B2%D1%96%D1%82_%Do%95%Do%BA%D1%81%Do%BF%D1%80%Do%B5%D1%81_%Do%BE%Do%BF%Do%B8%D1%82%D1%83%Do%B2%Do%Bo%Do%BD%Do%BD%D1%8F_%Do%9A%Do%Bo%D1%80%Do%Bo%Do%BD%D1%82%Do%B8%Do%BD_%D1%82%Do%Bo_Covid19_%Do%B6%Do%BE%Do%B2%D1%82%Do%B5%Do%BD%D1%8C_2020.pdf (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- Polek, T., Sanina, T., Sobol', Yu. (2021). *Vplyv pandemii COVID-19 na shchodenni praktyky dytynstva*. Ukrainskyi kulturnyi fond. Obtained from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xoX9zoEfvWU2LooRYVHqU2-05y6PC_Y/view (retrieved 22.11.2021).
- Yeremenko, A. (2020). *Ukrainsiam ne podobaietsia dystantsiine navchannia*. Active Group. Obtained from: <https://activegroup.com.ua/2020/10/20/ukra%1%97ncyam-ne-podobayetsya-distancijne-navchannia/> (retrieved 20.11.2021).
- All images (icons): Depositphotos* (<https://ua.depositphotos.com/>)