

ABSTRACT

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Lessons Learned from Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 PandemicAssociate Professor **Maslov Y. V.**¹¹ *Belarusian State Economic University, Belarus***Background:**

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic, a global calamity per se, has also become a true touchstone for national systems of education. Schools and universities worldwide had to switch over to emergency remote teaching format practically overnight. The present paper deals with the study of the effect of such teaching mode on students and faculty.

Methods:

The methodology used is essentially action research understood as a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The material of the research is the data obtained during the two-month-long teaching and learning period starting on 1 April 2020. The leading methods are self-observation and text analysis, as well as the technique of sharing experiences and reflective practices.

Results:

In conditions of the global pandemic, the educational research community has focused its attention on the notion of ‘emergency remote teaching’ (Hodges et al., 2020). Under the circumstances, the primary objective was (and still is) not to re-create a fully-fledged educational system but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports. This is what makes emergency remote teaching (ERT) qualitatively different from the more familiar notion of ‘online learning’. Simultaneously, the analysis of ERT results can give important insights into the workings of the existing educational processes and can help assess the level of the educational systems’ resilience.

Bernard et al. (2009) showed that the crucial factor determining the success of any type of distance education practice is the quality of interaction (student-student, student-teacher, and/or student-content). That is why the ultimate research question was whether ERT can provide the appropriate level of such interactions.

The observations were conducted by the researcher while teaching an advanced university course in Strategies for Communicative Behavior as part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum designed for senior students (4th year) at Belarusian State Economic University. Classes were fully online only (Zoom platform), and pacing of the instruction process was class-paced. Student – instructor ratio was 10 to 1, and all classes were practice-based, the role of both students and instructor active and synchronous. The researcher was able to receive feedback directly. Thus, reflective practices occurred sporadically

throughout the entire period, resulting in preparing the final 1000-word exam paper (analytical report) by students (n=40). The report texts were also subject to analysis.

The analyses revealed several important characteristics of ERT viewed from both the students’ and the instructor’s perspectives. Despite the relative novelty of the instructional setting, the students adapted quickly to the new conditions, which happened to provide multiple opportunities for in-depth study of various aspects of communicative behavior, specifically reflected in strategies for composing different types of business messages. The students displayed a high level of satisfaction with the ERT techniques used during the course, pointing out that those techniques primarily helped to visualize the information and personalize the process of acquiring new skills. However, ERT format proved to be a bigger challenge for the instructors who experienced difficulty calibrating the workloads in different subjects, which, at times, resulted in an excessive amount of written assignments given to the students.

Conclusions:

Action research effort during the period of ERT at the university level allows maintaining that online class-paced ESP studies can be as effective as face-to-face communication in the classroom. It reflects a high level of resilience and flexibility that the educational system possesses. However, such format may bring excessive pressure on both the instructors and students, which is an adverse effect and may harm the psychological health of the educational community as a whole.

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