# E-Learning at the Tertiary Level in and After Pandemic

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**Abstract**. The article deals with new challengers in higher education system in terms of reality caused by coronavirus COVID-19. Some positive experience in English distance teaching and learning (at the basis of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Ukraine) is described as it is significant in pandemic and may become useful for post pandemic society to improve educational processes. The purpose of the paper is to share positive ideas for English e-learning organization at the tertiary level in pandemic in order to use e-learning gains in further educational practice, highlight and solve its problems. General theoretical methods (analysis and synthesis) as well as empirical (observation and discussion) helped to find out advantages and identify disadvantages of the issue under study. The study has reached the following conclusions: asynchronous distance learning is effective for highly motivated students; synchronous forms demonstrate ability for developing all kinds of language skills. Advantages of distance teaching and learning there are: opportunity to display necessary didactic material on screen, to play audio recording or video materials for students in better quality. We have identified these problems: necessity of strong students' motivation, connected with self-organization and the ability to work independently; sometimes insufficient technical skills of academic staff; academic dishonesty, which leads to meaninglessness of testing.

**Key words:** Distance learning, University students, teaching English, higher school.

# El. mokymasis aukštosiose mokyklose pandemijos metu ir po jos

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje aptariami koronaviruso COVID-19 realybės sukelti iššūkiai aukštojo mokslo  sistemai. Pristatoma teigiama nuotolinio anglų kalbos mokymo ir mokymosi patirtis (Ukrainos Jaroslav Mudryi nacionaliniame teisės universitete) pasirodė reikšminga pandemijos metu ir gali būti naudinga visuomenei tobulinant ugdymo procesus ir po pandemijos. Straipsnio tikslas – pasidalyti teigiama patirtimi, kaip pandemijos metu aukštajame moksle organizuoti anglų kalbos mokymąsi elektroniniu būdu, siekiant ir vėliau panaudoti el. mokymosi pasiekimus švietimo praktikoje, išryškinti ir spręsti jos problemas. Išsiaiškinti nagrinėjamo klausimo pranašumus ir trūkumus padėjo bendrieji teoriniai (analizės ir sintezės) ir empiriniai (stebėjimo ir aptarimo) metodai. Tyrimo metu padarytos šios išvados: asinchroninis nuotolinis mokymasis efektyvus labai motyvuotiems studentams; sinchroninės mokymo formos padeda lavinti visų rūšių kalbinius įgūdžius. Nuotolinio mokymo ir mokymosi pranašumai – galimybė rodyti reikiamą didaktinę medžiagą ekrane, teikti studentams geresnės kokybės garso ar vaizdo medžiagą. Su tokiu mokymu siejamos problemos  – būtina stipri studentų motyvacija, ši susijusi su studentų saviorganizacija ir gebėjimu dirbti savarankiškai; kartais nepakankami techniniai akademinio personalo įgūdžiai; akademinis nesąžiningumas, dėl kurio testavimas tampa beprasmis.
**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** nuotolinis mokymasis, universiteto studentai, anglų kalbos mokymas, aukštoji mokykla.

## Introduction

Each epoch has its specific characteristics, which are reflected in industry, economy, science, culture, human life and other fields as well as in human psychology. Coronavirus COVID-19 that struck the world not only has changed all spheres of our life significantly but sharpened certain specifics of postmodern society. So it is quite possible that the life in the current society may become somewhere equal to existence in post pandemic one and the mentioned changes will affect us forever. Consequently we should, on the one hand, take a lesson from being in a long quarantine, analyze the gained experience and be ready to use that one, which appeared to be positive and can improve educational processes, on the other hand, adapt to new challenges that we might face soon.

However, recent advances in high technology and distribution of the global Internet give modern world great opportunities for overcoming some of the mentioned challenges.

So, speaking about educational sphere, thanks to developing telecommunications it not only has got a new useful experience of teaching and learning while working in the period of necessity of social distancing but also can improve the educational process. As current situation both in the country and in the world shows, the teaching experience received in the second half of 19/20 academic year has to be applied in 20/21. Moreover, nobody can predict for sure the development of the pandemic situation.

Anyway, some positive educational ideas accumulated with new information technologies in training, which have proven themselves well, may be used in teaching face-by-face as well. Thus it is topical to consider the approaches to teaching and learning in higher school in pandemic. The article proposes the experience of teaching English with the help of computers and telecommunications in Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv, Ukraine in the terms of pandemic.

## Literature Review

Since quarantine measures demand social distancing, Universities began using e-learning (in our research we will name it "distance teaching and learning" instead of usual "distance learning", because we suppose it to be very important underlining not only distance form of learning but also teaching as quite new in its current manifestation and challenging form for many higher school teachers) as an alternative to face-to-face training.

Continuous on-going technological progress, which affects modern education significantly, promoted applying various e-learning forms. Among them there are different forms of distance teaching and learning. Analysis of resent researches shows that the problem of the application of the mentioned phenomenon in education is rather popular. There are not only papers devoted to the issue but also annual conferences as well as custom programs created for strengthening professionals' individual skills in distance teaching and learning.

Considering researches we can divide them into two parts.

1) The papers dealing directly with distance education, namely, the teacher's role in distance teaching (Fokin et al., 2017; Mykytiuk et al., 2022), distance learning perspectives (Kalita, 2020; Traxler, 2018), distance form as a means of life-long learning (Kozlova, 2013), distance courses on the basis of different educational platforms (Karelina, 2004; Smirnova & Afanaseva, 2017) and cloud computing (Holubnycha et al., 2019; Melnychuk et al., 2019), distance teaching and learning principles (Khutorsky, 2014; Zelitchenko, 2020), data analysis of main current trends of different countries (Wotto, 2020), research areas in this educational form (Zawacki-Richter, 2009) and others.

2) The papers that address to distance teaching and learning as the form of education in pandemic. In general these researches demonstrate educational experience of different countries in the COVID-19 pandemic. These countries are Turkey (Aksu, 2020), Nigeria (Itobore, 2020), Ukraine (Holubnycha & Baibekova, 2020; Marchuk & Yatsyna, 2020; Sultanova et al., 2021), Cuba (Cruz et al., 2020), Philippines (Moralista & Oducado, 2020), Colombia (Seo, 2020), India ( Dubey & Pandey, 2020) and many others.

However, there are still many lacunas in the study of experience of a foreign language distance teaching and learning in higher school. So it is significant to fill these gaps.

Thus, the **purpose** of the research is to share positive ideas as for organization of English distance teaching and learning at the tertiary level in the society of new reality in order to realize e-learning gains and highlight its gaps for further educational practice.

## Method

As the paper is rather theoretical-argumentative than experimental we have used general theoretical methods such as analysis and synthesis of resent researches, and empirical ones as observation and discussion, which helped us to find out advantages and identify

problems in organization of distance teaching and learning of English at the tertiary level.

## Results

It is known that the results of social progress today are concentrated in the information sphere, which can be characterized as telecommunications. They are serving as the basis for e-learning or the distance teaching and learning system during the quarantine period and make it possible to acquire the necessary skills and new knowledge using personal computers and access to the Internet.

Since the location of the personal computer does not matter, students can study from home, while universities are able to realize the human rights to education in the context of the pandemic. (However, it is necessary to tell the truth that not all students have proper Internet connection. First of all it concerns mountain regions of Ukraine, and the connection may also depend on weather. So students from these regions have certain problems with some forms of distance learning.)

In conditions of social distancing the implementation of distance teaching and learning technologies at the tertiary level is intended to make educational interaction between the teacher and students possible as well as to be a convenient, fast, continuous and psychologically comfortable educational tool, which is capable to improve and develop traditional full-time and part-time educational forms.

As the most part of academic staff of the mentioned University had not had any experience of applying distance education technologies by the start of quarantine restrictions in March 2020, both the University management and its departments began studying the problem and developing suitable tools and technologies for distance teaching and learning.

The analysis of researches (Karelina, 2004; Kozlova, 2013; Smirnova & Afanaseva, 2017) on distance education has shown that there are two quite different methods of it. They are synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods. The method of synchronous distance teaching and learning provides for communication between a student and a teacher in real time, which is so-called on-line communication. The method of asynchronous distance teaching and learning is used when communication between a teacher and a student in real time is impossible. Then we speak about off-line communication. (We consider it significant to note that in current reality it became popular to name face-to-face education in a classroom as off-line education. It is important not to confuse these two quite different notions, so we decided to distinguish between them.)

Generally the best results in education usually are reached when teachers use different teaching techniques. So we could suggest that in the context of distance teaching and learning the greatest effectiveness would be achieved when the curriculum is built from elements of blended distance methods: on-line and off-line.

Considering asynchronous distance learning (off-line communication), we understand it as the creation of distance courses using special shell programs designed for

distance learning. The advantage of this option is that these programs have a template for the structure of the course being created.

Thus, on the basis of educational management system Moodle (version 3.7), Information Technology Department of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University developed its own portal "Educational Electronic Information Complex" (EEIC) (https://neik.nlu. edu.ua/moodle/), which became the University platform for off-line education. (As soon as the mentioned EEIC portal was created for inside usage it has only national interface so we decided it to be not informative to demonstrate it.)

Practice has shown that the educational benefits of EEIC are very similar to Moodle. In terms of the organization of the teaching and learning process they are as follows.

1) Interaction of students with each other and with the teacher in written form. For this purpose such elements as forums and chats can be used.
2) Transfer of knowledge electronically using files, archives, web pages, lectures.
3) Testing knowledge with tests and assignments. Students can send the results of the work in text form or as files.

(Collaboration of students in educational and research work on a specific topic, using built-in wiki mechanisms, seminars, forums, which is usual with Moodle, unfortunately is impossible on EEIC portal due to the lack of powerful services at the University.)

Researchers unanimously assert that Moodle possess a number of advantages such as accessibility (remote learning option), efficiency (fast transfer of teaching material), resource-intensity (does not need additional costs), educational democracy (partnership relations) and others (Rebukha & Polishchuk, 2020).

Like any form of education, distance teaching and learning on the basis of Moodle or EEIC portal of the University has a certain component composition: namely, goals due to the social order for all forms of education; the content, also largely determined by the current curriculum for a specific type of educational level; methods; organizational forms; teaching aids. The last three components in distance teaching and learning are, due to the technological basis of education, used specifically (for example, only computer telecommunications, computer telecommunications in combination with printed means, CDs, so-called case technology, etc.) (Zelitchenko, 2020).

Distance teaching and learning is structured in accordance with the same goals and content as face-to-face education. But the forms of presentation of the material and the forms of interaction between the teacher and the students are different. The didactic principles of organizing distance teaching and learning (principles of scientific nature, consistency and systematicity, activity, principles of developmental education, visibility, differentiation and individualization of education, etc.) are also the same as in face-to-face education, but quite different is their implementation. That is due to the specifics of the mentioned form of education, the capabilities of the Internet information environment, its services.

Thus, speaking about distance teaching of English at the tertiary level, where we have to train five kinds of activity (reading, writing, speaking, listening and use of Eng-

lish) and taking into account that English is not a profile subject in the mentioned University what is why the most part of our students are not highly motivated for self-learning, the academic staff of our department (Department of Foreign Languages #3) made a decision to use off-line teaching on the basis of EEIC portal in order to develop four of the mentioned skills (reading, writing, listening and use of English) only as additional training. The practice has shown that poorly motivated students usually do not perform the tasks themselves; instead they use the Internet as well as Google Translator (Kostikova, 2019) or other kinds of help while doing their tasks. Even the time limit that is the option of the portal does not prevent academic dishonesty. Even parallel use of additional information technologies, allowing teachers to see their students performing the tasks, does not guarantee the independence of  performing the assignment and not cheating.

The most unpleasant situation is connected with writing tests: although EEIC portal provides for testing a huge number of variants offering an individual one for every student, unexpectedly for the academic staff of the department students with poor knowledge of English have demonstrated better results (56–60 points from 60 possible) than those with rather fluent English (42–55 points from 60 possible), who really worked a lot and did tests themselves. (Unfortunately, as we have already mentioned, EEIC portal has only national interface and we only could demonstrate the revealed results using native language, so we made a decision not to do it.)

We consider it important to note that such situation is not unique for a foreign language subject. Academic staff of the whole University faced the same problem. It became especially significant in the period of the summer set of examinations. So when the time for the winter set of examinations was approaching, the University management made a decision not to use testing on EEIC portal. Instead there were proposed two variants of conducting examinations: either on-line meeting and questioning students without examination cards or putting examination marks on the basis of the marks got by the student at seminars and practical on-line classes.

The academic staff of the Department of Foreign Languages #3 has tried also to use Google Form for the same purpose but it did not change the situation. So, we have faced a problem of monitoring knowledge in written form and, unfortunately, we cannot solve this problem.

Another form of off-line teaching and learning is using different cloud services. Although there are a number of similar educational services, at our department Quizlet is applied more often. It provides several kinds of assignments for developing vocabulary directed at memorization, pronunciation learning, writing, and there is also a function of testing for self-control. All the options are proposed in gaming form, besides students have possibility to compete with each other and the teacher can see who worked with this educational service and what results they achieved. The interface of Quizlet is demonstrated in Figure 1.
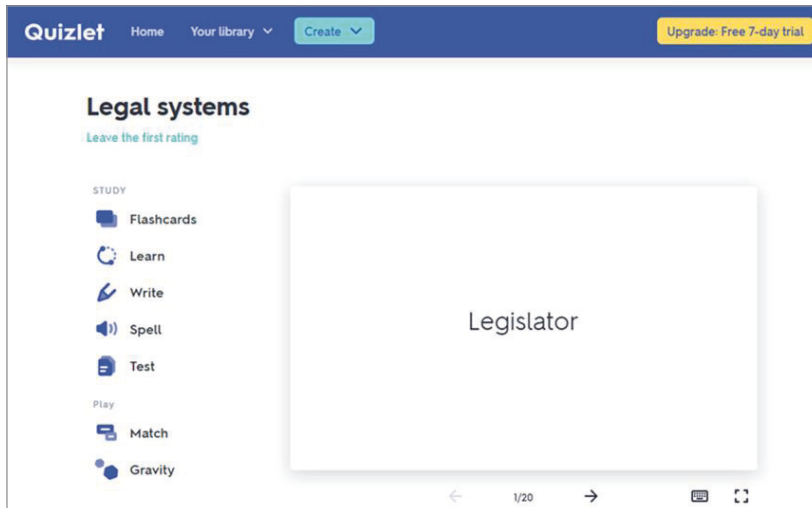
**Figure 1.** *Options for vocabulary learning provided by Quizlet*
Source: Authors' own conception

As soon as we teach our students legal English, the academic staff of the department created flash-cards with legal terms on conversational topics in accordance with the curriculum.

Another option proposed by Quizlet, which additionally helps students to develop their vocabulary, is a computer game Gravity. An example is presented in Figure 2.
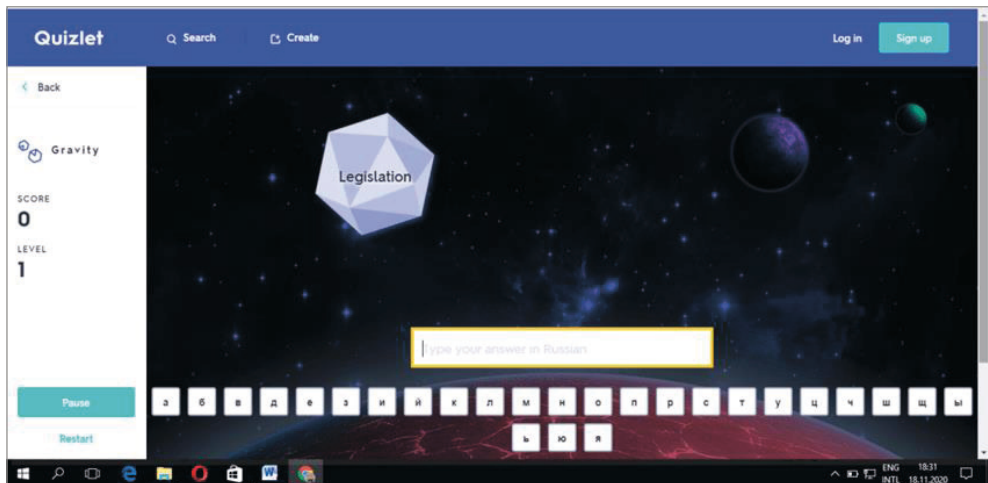


**Figure 2.** *Gravity – a variant of computer game with Quizlet*
Source: Authors' own conception

Such service has proven itself as very useful for increasing vocabulary. Especially it works for those students, who are highly motivated. And we really have fixed progress (Holubnycha, 2019). Unfortunately, this service (like others similar to it) cannot be used for development of all the skills listed above.

Taking into account all the above mentioned, the academic staff of the department uses on-line forms and methods of teaching as the main ones. For us video conferencing on different platforms (in our case they are Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and others), which is a modern telecommunication service, became the basis for creating an educational space since it allows academic staff both to teach and communicate with students in real time (i.e. on-line). Moreover, video conferencing provides the ability to simultaneously see and hear your interlocutor on the screen creating the effect of direct communication and due to this video conference sessions are the closest to face-to-face education. Practically the only difference is that students work together and with their teacher at a distance.

Among the advantages of such on-line teaching and learning there is the achievement of educational objectives, ensuring systematic and effective interactivity as well as feedback from the student and educational material, providing the opportunity for group learning. The presence of effective feedback allows the student to receive information about his progress and the teacher to make necessary correctness along the student's path to knowledge. That is why academic staff considers video conferencing being rather convenient for reading lectures, conducting seminars and workshops as well as different extracurricular activities with students (for example, individual and group consultations, scientific conferences, intellectual quiz, speaking club etc.).

Speaking about teaching English at the tertiary level, all kinds of activity (reading, writing, speaking, listening and use of English) are supposed to be trained on-line. So concerning reading, all its techniques (reading texts in detail, skimming, scanning) can be trained. Moreover, developing reading skills is more convenient in video conferencing than ordinary face-to-face lesson as while using telecommunication technologies teachers can display necessary text material on screen instead of printing a certain number of copies. The mentioned can be seen in Figure 3.

In Figure 3 you can see five small original texts and eight variants of titles. Students have to match the titles with the texts paying attention that three titles are odd.

The same function may be applied to develop use of English and writing skills. For example, in Figure 4 there is a text, on the basis of which the students had to write an annotation.

Another additional opportunity to develop not only writing skills but also reading and use of English, given by digital technology (presenting asynchronous distance learning), which is widely used at our department, is written communication with our students with the help of social networks. The example of such correspondence is presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 3.** *Developing Scanning*
Source: https://www.slideshare.net/guest52c665/the-legal-systems-of-the-world
http://study.com/academy/lesson/religious-law-definition-purpose.html
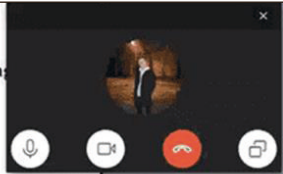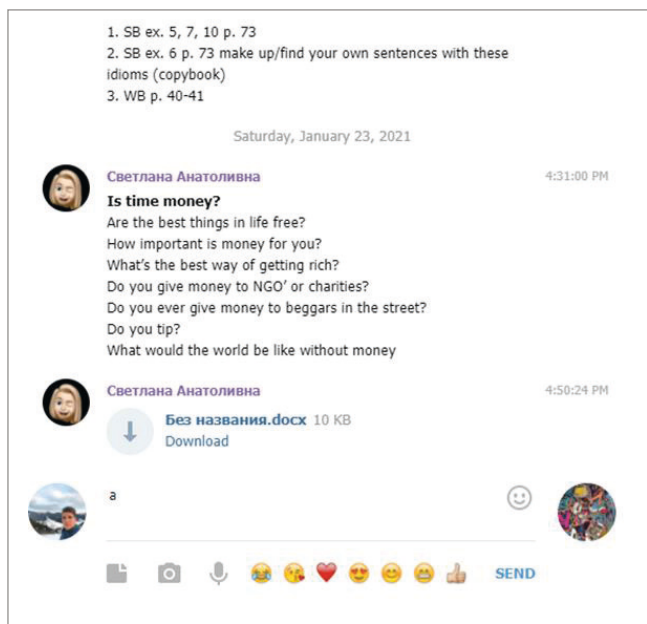and authors' own conception



**Figure 4.** *The Task for Developing Writing Skills*
Source: CNN, March 15, 2020

*Figure 5. Fragment of correspondence of teacher of the department with her students*
Source: Authors' own conception

In Figure 5 you can see students' home assignment from text-books and questions for making dialogues, composed by the authors.

Considering listening skills, their developing has got more possibilities in the format of video conference sessions than at ordinary classroom lessons of Ukrainian Universities (because of very often poor equipment of classrooms) as not only printed but also audio and video materials have become more available for presentation to students.

Situation with developing speaking skills is ambiguous. On the one hand, video conferencing gives enough opportunities to develop foreign language speaking skills. On the other hand, taking into account poor motivation of a sufficiently large number of our students, only spontaneous speaking may be useful. Unfortunately, the academic staff of the department has faced the problem that we cannot solve properly: we cannot find a suitable or worthy way to control learned by heart lexical material or in advance prepared speech. The only way that we could invent is to ask our students to close their eyes and pull out their headphones. And that cannot be the solution for the XXI century. The same problem arises with written monitoring knowledge.

Speaking about specifics of teaching through video conferencing, it is significant to notice that there are some general rules concerning the special nature of the perception of educational information from the screen. Firstly, the format of the "talking head" is pedagogically ineffective. The lecturer is obliged to act as a comprehension aid, not just a supplier of information. So a video sequence is needed. Secondly, visual material should be prepared methodically competently and technically skillfully. Unfortunately, not all lecturers (especially the older generation) possess sufficient technical skills.

## Discussion

In general, all the above mentioned does not contradict to the previous researches. Moreover, we strongly agree with R. Moralista and R. Oducado (2020), who suppose that the result of e-learning will be growth of academic dishonesty, which became the most unsolvable problem for our academic staff. M. García Cruz, D. Mainegra Fernández and I. Domínguez García (2020) state the close problem. However, R. Moralista and R. Oducado also underline such features of on-line education as impersonality and lack of feeling. We cannot say that we fully support this opinion.

Another idea expressed in our research – the idea about necessity of high motivation for efficiency of distance teaching and learning – is proven by Samuel E. Seo (2020), who demonstrated benefits of theological distance education for western cross-cultural teachers and remote Columbian churches. When both sides of educational process are motivated the pros prevail over cons.

The most of researchers (V. Potop, V. Manolachi and A. Kulbaev (2020), R. Moralista and R. Oducado (2020), P. Dubey and D. Pandey (2020), S. Seo (2020), U. Kalita (2020), C. Aksu (2020) and others) undertake problems similar to ours connected with access to the Internet and lack of training for academic staff in order they could effectively apply various forms and methods of distance teaching.

A number of researchers propose their methods of e-learning as efficient ones. So, T. Itobore (2020) considers case study – one of the forms of learning based on problem solving method, effectiveness of which is known all over the world. In our practice this method is widely used and really proves itself well with motivated students, however, for those with lack of motivation it also has possibilities for academic dishonesty. A. Zelitchenko (2020) proposes active corresponding with students while email exchange should include not only massages but also images, audio and video files. The researcher supposes that daily email exchange will make students work. Unfortunately, our experience has shown the same result as case study has, i.e. it is useful for motivated students. Moreover, students with low level of knowledge began complaining about the inability to complete tasks in this mode.

## Conclusions

Having studied the problem of e-learning and using distance teaching and learning of English at the tertiary level nearly a year (since the middle of March 2020) we could reach the following conclusions:

- Methods of asynchronous distance learning (off-line learning) may be effective for highly motivated students otherwise it should be used as additional learning, moreover, it mostly facilitates academic dishonesty when used for testing.
- Methods of synchronous distance teaching and learning (on-line communication) may be efficient for developing all kinds of language skills. Besides, we suppose these methods to be more convenient for training reading and listening than in classroom education because of additional options of telecommunication technologies, which are not always available in a classroom.

Thus, among the advantages of distance teaching and learning (except well-known and mentioned in the most part of studies) we have discovered the following: opportunity to display necessary didactic material on screen, while in face-to-face education we have either to print a certain number of copies of this material or to have classrooms equipped with personal computers; opportunity to start audio recording or video materials for students in the better quality.

Besides advantages the following problems were identified: for efficiency of e-learning strong students' motivation that is connected with self-organization and the ability to work independently is needed; not all academic staff possess sufficient technical skills; testing is not informative because of widespread academic dishonesty.

Thus, one of the challenges of modern teaching and learning is to find a balance between distance (virtual) and real meaningful communication, professional activity and real interpersonal interaction.

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