



Teaching online in Higher Education Institutions. Latvia

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Background

The digitization of higher education in Latvia is determined by several policy planning documents and in these documents the digitization goals are specified to reach in Latvia by 2027:

1. Actively use digital solutions in digital study platforms, technology integration in study content and in research and for streamlining internal processes;
2. To improve the skills of both academic staff and researchers in the use of digital technologies;
3. Transfer new knowledge and new technologies to the population (lifelong learning).

There are two main directions for the use of digital technologies in studies: digital learning the use of methods in the study process, such as audiovisual lecture materials, digital tests, and integration of technologies in the study content requires digital corresponding to the respective field of study the availability of technologies and academic staff who are able and motivated to use these technologies. To ensure that HEIs would be able to develop in both directions, ecosystem elements should be provided at several levels: international level, the national level, the interinstitutional level and the institutional level of the institutions.

Description of HE in Latvia

The higher education system in Latvia is binary, as the Education Law distinguishes between academic and professional higher education and system is managed at two levels - national and institutional. The Parliament (Saeima), the Cabinet of Ministers and

the Ministry of Education and Science are the main decision-making bodies at the state level.

Digital transformation and digital competence

The field of education has been somewhat resistant to widespread digital transformation up until the crisis caused by Covid-19 for various reasons – a lack of financing for technologies and technological solutions; a lack of continuous technological support and quality further education for educators; a negative attitude towards technologies caused by a lack of experience or negative experience using technologies.

Digitalization of HE in Latvia

The Digital Transformation Guidelines set out by 2027 states that HE needs to improve education and access to education, management, quality of science, development of digital teaching materials and accounting system, as well as to improve the quality and availability of research data and researchers digital literacy. The Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2021-2027" Future skills for the society of the future" identifies digitalization as a major horizontal change, envisaging the development of digital skills as a cross-cutting competence, increasing the supply of e-learning in vocational, higher and adult education, the development of digital learning management platforms, digital learning resources and support materials and integration in the study process. In The Guidelines for the Development of Education 2021-2027 digitization is planned as an essential pillar of both curriculum and learning approach.

Response to Covid-19 in HE in Latvia

At national level, the Emergency Situation came into force immediately with the Cabinet Order of 12 March 2020 (Order of Cabinet of Ministers No. 103, 2020). The on-site training process was stopped, providing remote learning in all educational institutions as far as possible. Later on emergency situation in Latvia was extended to 11th of June, 2020. The amendment in Education law was accepted where the term “remote learning” is included and it states that remote learning is a part of the full-time educational process in which learners learn, including by using information and communication technologies, without being physically in the same room or place as the teacher (Education Law, 1998, as amended in 2020, November 20). Higher education institutions were free to issue their own internal documents to organize internal processes to follow the government regulations.

In the fall semester of 2020 the study process began as on-site studies but as the number of Covid-19 cases increased the decision was taken to declare Emergency Situation (from 9th November 2020 to 6th April 2021) and it came into force immediately with the Cabinet Order No 655 of 6th November 2020 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2020). From 11th October 2021 to 11th January 2022, new Emergency Situation is declared in Latvia (Cabinet order

No 720) and on 20th of October there was amendments made in this order with Order No 748 and it was declared that there is a lockdown from 21st of October until 15th of November and all the educational institutions turn to full remote learning.

Conclusions

In order to promote the quality of higher education, it is necessary to support lecturers in strengthening the following pedagogical-digital competence aspects:

- promoting the use of technology in the study process to achieve learning goals, so that students gain more experience in using technology for learning purposes;
- use of technologies in the study process to create innovative learning solutions;
- bringing the distance learning process closer to the implementation of a student-centered education approach.

It is already the third emergency situation in Latvia and students and academic staff learned new strategies how to organize study process and it is showed by data gathered from students of one faculty. We have to think how to support social interaction as it is one of the main goals since the social constructivist approach highlights the importance of social interaction for the best learning to occur (Campbell, 2004).

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