UNIT 3.

SUPPORT WAYS

AND SYSTEMS

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IMPROVEMENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCE OF THE TEACHERS IN ON-LINE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION
PROJECT NO 2020-1-ES01-KA201-082730

Unit 3. Support ways and systems

Aim of the unit is to discuss the support ways and tools in distance learning:

- Skills of identifying students' support
- Supporting learners in distance learning

1.1. Skills for students' support

Successful distance learning depends on the organization of processes, the competencies of participants, the division of responsibilities, adequate security, didactic and technological choices, infrastructure, or the quality of the technique and software that learners and teachers have at home and are using for distance learning. However, the roles of teachers are changing, and the value of instructional designer roles are increasing [36], teachers need not only methodological support but technological support, as well. The results of the investigation [37] show that the teacher's digital competence on the techno- Sustainability 2021, 13, 4751 7 of 22 logical platform and the metacognitive support available in the digital environment are significant factors to attain its pedagogical objectives successfully. The support process for teachers and students requires more effort during distance learning [1].

It is also important for a higher education institution to find out whether all the students have sufficient provisions for distance learning. Students may not be able to afford laptops or desktop computers or be able to pay for internet access plans with sufficient bandwidth for data-heavy applications [2]. If some students are not equipped with either hardware or software, and they will not be able to acquire it soon, support for such students must be considered. If the higher education institution does not have such possibilities and such cases are not isolated, the institution administration should assess the appropriateness of distance learning. In this case, either a blended or hybrid approach should be considered, allowing students to participate in the study process by arriving on campus. Similar decisions may also be taken if it is found that not all students have an adequate social environment for distance learning.

Distance learning requires appropriate digital competencies for the lecturer and the student. Before deciding on the organization of distance learning, a higher education institution must assess the digital competencies of lecturers in the following areas:

1) Professional activity: the use of digital technologies for communication, cooperation, and professional development;
2) Digital resources: information search, creation, and sharing of digital resources;
3) Teaching and learning: management and use of digital technologies in teaching and learning;
4) Assessment: the use of digital technologies and strategies for assessment;
5) Student empowerment: the use of digital technologies to promote engagement, personalization, and active student participation;
6) Improving students' digital competencies: allowing students to use digital technologies creatively and responsibly to gather information, communicate, create content, and solve problems.

The identified digital competencies and experience of lecturers to use the proper software, systems and virtual learning platforms contribute to the institution administration's decision on technology for the development of VLE. Once the lack of digital competencies required for distance education has been identified, the institution's administration should assess the possibilities to organize the development of digital competencies in the nearest future. In the absence of the possibility to provide the educator with the minimum digital competencies required for distance learning, support should be offered, it should

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also be prepared for the substitution of the educator and/or reallocation of the corresponding workload. The digital competencies of students must also be assessed. The following competencies should be assessed:

1) Literacy in the use of information and media;
2) Communication and cooperation in the digital space;
3) Creation of digital content;
4) Responsible use of digital technologies;
5) Solving digital problems.

If the assessment of the current situation shows that it is appropriate to organize distance, blended or hybrid education, further steps must be taken. Considering the needs and opportunities identified at the stage of preparing for distance learning, the higher education institution must organize the provision in the case of insufficient equipment for lecturers and students, an adequate social environment, the organization of the acquisition of ICT infrastructure suitable for distance learning, the creation of VLE, and the development of digital competences for lecturers and students. At the same time, the institution administration must draw up descriptions of the procedures governing distance learning so that they enable lecturers to organize their work.

The descriptions of the procedure should include decisions on:

1) A timetable of the studies;
2) Provision of study assistance to students who have entered or returned from other countries and other students with individual or special study needs;
3) Ensuring cooperation and feedback for students;
4) Adaptation of the study process for distance learning.

To ensure the highest possible quality of distance learning, it is necessary to organize assistance on technology use for all participants in the study process, and methodological and digital support should also be provided. A higher education institution should take care of information, regarding distance learning, and provision to educators and students. An institution's systems for providing information to students should include:

1) Procedures for the organization of distance learning;
2) Schedule of lectures indicating how the lecture will be delivered (remotely and/or in the classroom);
3) Contact details of the support skilled person;
4) Answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Students should be kept informed (by email, messages on the institution's website, or by other agreed means) of events and decisions relating to the organization of distance learning. The institution's administration needs to monitor distance learning. The monitoring enables the identification of organizational weaknesses and remedies them to improve the quality of distance learning.
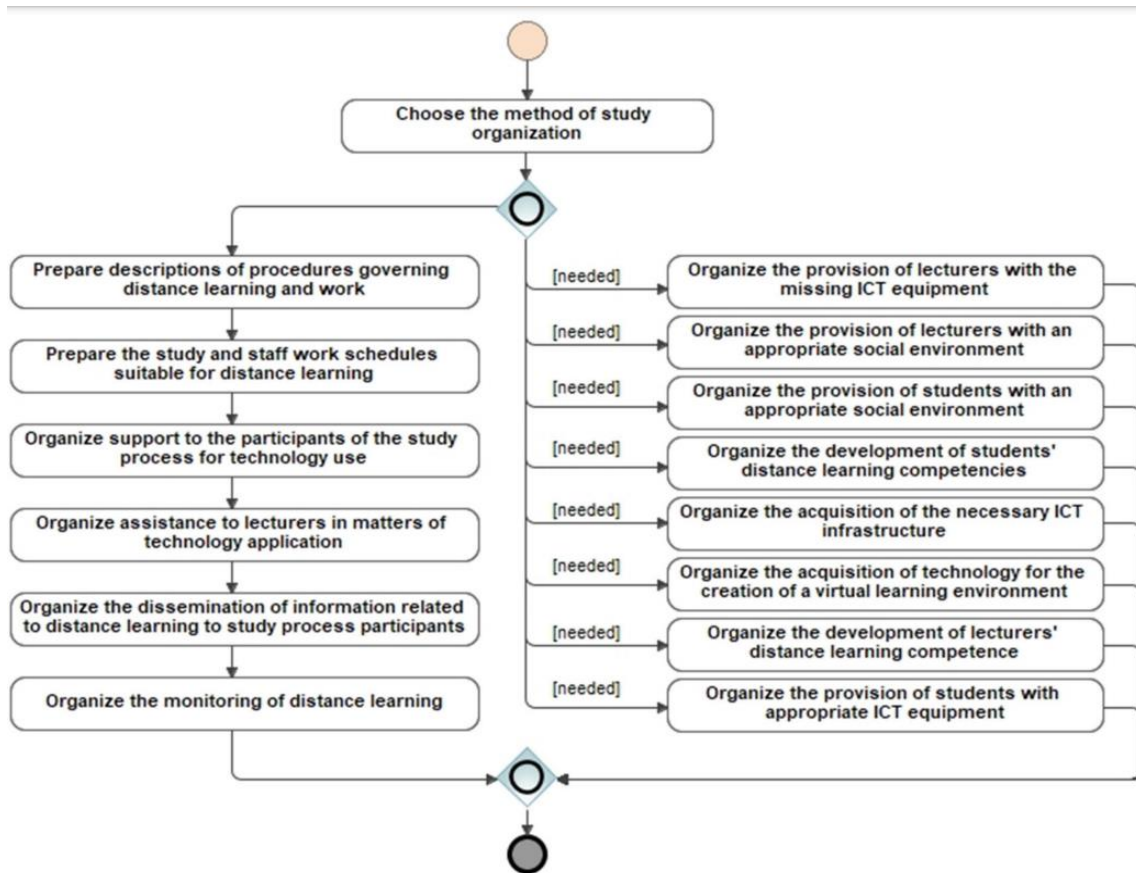
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fig. Model of the preparation for distance learning and remote work [1].

1.2. Supporting learners in distance learning

Upon starting distance learning and remote work, a higher education institution must ensure:

1) Timely publication of information related to distance learning and remote work in the institution's online systems, VLE and other channels established in the institution's community;
2) Provision of the necessary methodological, technological, and administrative assistance to lecturers, administrative staff, and students;
3) Planned improvement of lecturers' digital competencies;
4) Continuous monitoring of the study process;
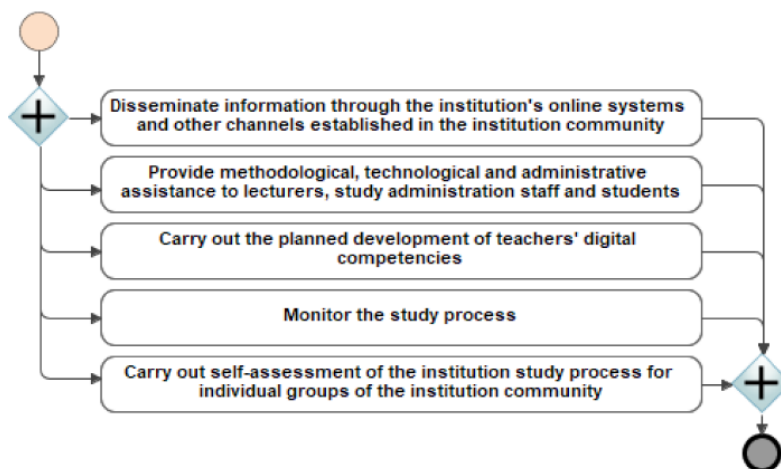5) Assessment of the institution study process for individual groups in the institution community.

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fig. Model of the process of distance learning and remote work.

Teachers support processes [3]:

1) Help students develop new daily strategies.
2) Help them use this time as an opportunity to develop new strategies to help with focus and learning.
3) You might also help your students create new schedules that match their strengths.
4) You could even design a lesson around this as a research project or an essay.

Students might need more help coming up with strategies and learning how to use them. Have students start by choosing two to three strategies to try. After a week or two, have them evaluate which ones helped and which strategies they want to try next. Possible strategies include:

Schedule work times and break times.

1) Set a timer and keep working until it goes off.
2) Try different apps to help with focus.
3) Set a goal. For example: I will write one paragraph before I take a break.
4) Create a checklist.
5) Work on the hardest or easiest thing first (choose one).
6) Put your phone in a different room or in your backpack.
7) Find a quiet space or use headphones to block out noise.

Keep the easy part easy.

Think about the last time you forgot your password to an account and got locked out -- yet again. Or the last time you read complicated directions and couldn't figure out what you were supposed to do.

What might seem like a minor stressor to you can be the difference between whether a student finishes a lesson or not. Adults have more coping strategies than kids do to persist through challenges. Kids and teens are still developing this resiliency.

You can help reduce these barriers to learning by using best practices for designing online assignments. Try these ideas for how to keep the easy part easy:

1) Teach students how to access class information.

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2) Simplify directions.
3) Be consistent in how class materials are organized and presented.

Find new ways to meet students' needs.

Students with individualized education programs (IEPs) should still get the accommodations they need during distance learning. Their needs and accommodations might look different in this new learning environment, though.

For online classes, teachers also need to ensure their lessons are accessible. Make sure that materials can be read by a screen reader and that students who use text-to-speech technology know how to use it. Some video-streaming apps like Google Hangouts offer live captioning. Using best practices for online learning like these can help you make sure your lessons are accessible.

Is your school providing distance learning through printed packets? You may need to be even more creative in how you provide accommodations. For example, if you have a student with dyslexia who needs materials read out loud, you might consider scheduling a call with that student or providing a recording. Brainstorm ideas with your school, the student, and their family to figure out how to meet individual needs.

Keep up positive relationships with students.

Maintaining positive relationships with students and families is essential, especially during distance learning. Students who learn and think differently and their families will likely need more frequent check-ins. Use these check-ins to:

1) Make sure students understand lessons.
2) Find out whether students have what they need to do their classwork.
3) Help students develop learning strategies.
4) Talk about student accommodations and support.
5) Better understand students' social-emotional well-being.

Teachers will need to work with their school district and families to figure out the best platform and format for checking in. Keep in mind that families might have a lot going on right now and be unable to respond.

References

[1] Gudoniene, D., Jusas, V., Butkiene, R., Venčkauskas, A., Burbaite, R., Grigaliūnas, Š., & Andone, D. (2021). Models for Administration to Ensure the Successful Transition to Distance Learning during the Pandemic. *Sustainability*, *13*(9), 4751.
[2] Gudoniene, D., Navickiene, V., Dagiene, V., Jasute, E., Butkiene, R., (2021). Pandemic-induced qualitative changes in the process of university studies from the perspective of university authorities. *Sustainability*, *13*(17), 9887.
[3]ttps://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/4-best-practices-for-distance-learning-to-support-students-who-learn-and-think-differently