



# UNIT 1.

## KEY FEATURES OF EXTERNAL DISTANCE LEARNING SOLUTION REPOSITORIES

### AIM

Presentation of the key features and functions of distance learning solution repositories

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# Unit 1. Key features of external distance learning solution repositories

## 1.1. What are external distance learning solution repositories?

Two features are important when speaking of distance learning solution repositories. These are data storage and management. Distance learning solution repositories are not only a place where the materials can be stored but where the people involved in a particular project/lesson can communicate and plan tasks. Distance learning solution repositories can be also called project management software.

Project management software is used by a lot of institutions for planning, gathering materials and communication. It is successfully used by companies in project management but it can also facilitate e-learning.

A good project management software should have 5 functions:

task list	schedule	files repository	communication	reporting
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- **task list** – possibility to assign and update the status of tasks
- **schedule** – calendars, Gantt charts, milestones to determine
- **files repository** – possibility to share files, organize them in categories, even work on them online
- **communication** – possibility to write messages through the platform; all the conversations in one place
- **reporting** – sending information about the progress, completion of the task, etc.

All the functions can be really useful for the organization and management of the learning process:

- **Task lists** and **schedules** will facilitate the organization of the lessons. Students will get clear information about what are they responsible for, what they should do (e.g. homework) and when. Information about exams, assignments, deadlines for reading books, topics of the lessons can be put into the schedule.
- All the **files** used during the lesson can be uploaded and grouped (there can be a separate folder for each lesson), therefore each student can easily find it. It is very useful for students who did not participate in a lesson – they need just click to get all the materials.
- Discussions through the platform greatly facilitate **communication** and information transfer. A teacher can share information with all the students by clicking their names from the list, students can have their discussions. It supports collaboration and learning from others.
- **Reporting** is helpful for a teacher who has clear information about students' progress in tasks completing and also for students who can see what has not been done yet.

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## 1.2. Useful functions

### Mobile application

Project management software can be used in a browser but they also give the possibility to work from different devices. There are mobile applications to download on your computer and mobile phones. Thanks to that you can work on different devices and different places.

### Integration with other digital tools

Project management software works with various tools that are used in online education. They can be integrated with your e-mail box (e.g. Gmail, Outlook), your calendar, drives (e.g. Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox), video conferencing services (e.g. Zoom, Skype) and other collaboration tools (e.g. MS Teams).

### Different formats of content

You can upload and use multiple formats of educational materials. You can upload not only word documents, pdf-s and ppt presentations but also YouTube videos and interactive documents. Each participant can download the file and work on it on their own devices and then upload it when it is ready. There is also the possibility to work on the files online – then everybody sees the changes made by someone else.

## 1.3. Advantages and challenges of learning management solutions

There are plenty of advantages of using project management software which is devoted not only to projects but is also successfully used in education (*6 Best Project*, 2021).

- Project/learning management solutions facilitate collaborative learning in remote education. Students can work on one document together, see the comments of the others and make changes. They can also communicate through the platform, discuss tasks and educational projects, ask and answer questions.
- Working with learning management solutions gives the possibility to both synchronous and asynchronous learning. They can work online using video conferencing services integrated with the platform or they can do it asynchronously, e.g. editing one document (everyone can see the changes made by others).
- Group members are informed about tasks, deadlines, changes, etc. It facilitates information flow and well organization of the learning process. Students absent during a lesson can easily find information about the topic, tasks and homework. Also, parents can be involved in the platform and monitor their children's work.
- Project management software helps the teacher watch over the learning process, monitor the progress in completing tasks, control the level of advancement and involvement of the

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students. Also, evaluation is easier with such a tool – the teacher can resend the task with comments, give advice during the process of completing exercises, etc.

Before working with project/learning management software one should know that it also has some challenges.

- Teachers and students need to learn the system. In the beginning, working with the platform can be annoying and time-consuming. A teacher should also remember to explain the system to the students and check if they can use it. This challenge can be also an opportunity to develop digital skills.
- Using learning management solutions requires good organization of the learning process and discipline from all members of the group. Students should know where to find the materials and tasks, where to put the files, when to inform, etc. Good organization leads to quick, easy and comfortable learning. Bad organization makes a mess.
- Using project management software may not work well at teaching young children – the systems are too complicated for them. Small children need a more direct way of communication and learning as they are not independent in learning yet.
- Working with learning management solutions takes time not only for learning the platform and explaining to students how it works. It also takes time to set milestones, alerts and reporting, create a calendar, etc. It is time-consuming at the beginning, then it becomes automatic and facilitates the learning process.
- To take advantage of all the amenities and capabilities of the learning management platform, you need to purchase the premium version of some platforms. Free versions have limited options but they are still worth considering. There are also free platforms which are also very useful and comfortable.

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