

CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES PRAGUE

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT



**ABSTRACT OF
DIPLOMA THESIS**

**LIFELONG LEARNING - ONLINE LEARNING
AS A TOOL FOR ADULT EDUCATION**

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Lifelong Learning - Online learning as a tool for adult education

Celoživotní vzdělávání - Online learning Jako nástroj vzdělávání pro dospělé

SOUHRN

Cílem této diplomové práce je představit termíny vzdělávání dospělých a on-line vzdělávání obecně a prokázat význam on-line vzdělávání jako nástroje pro přístupnější vzdělávání pro dospělé. Diplomová práce se skládá ze dvou částí. Teoretická část charakterizuje vzdělávání přes internet, vysvětluje všechny důležité pojmy spojené se synchronní a asynchronní on-line výukou a definuje je. Praktická část je zaměřena na synchronní vzdělávání v on-line kurzu Metodika on-line vzdělávání, v rámci projektu realizovaného společností iCORD International. Celý proces poskytování webového semináře-webináře je podrobně popsán a jsou vyhodnoceny hlavní výhody a nevýhody. Kromě toho je vypracován průzkum mezi vzdělavateli dospělých a výsledky jsou vyhodnoceny. Součástí diplomové práce je i SWOT analýza online synchronního vzdělávání.

SUMMARY

The objective of this diploma thesis is to introduce the terms of education of adults and online learning in general and to prove the importance of online learning as a tool for more accessible education for adults. The diploma thesis consists of two parts. The theoretical part is characterizing education through the Internet, explains all important terms connected synchronous and asynchronous online learning and defines them. The practical part is focused on synchronous learning during the online course Methodology of online learning, in the frame of a project implemented by company iCORD International. The whole process of providing a web-based seminar, webinar, is described in detail and the advantages and disadvantages are evaluated. Furthermore, a

survey among educators is made and the results are evaluated. A part of the thesis is also represented by SWOT analysis of online synchronous learning.

Klíčová slova: celoživotní vzdělávání, online výuka, vzdělávání dospělých, webinar, synchronní vzdělávání, virtuální učebna

Keywords: lifelong learning, online learning, adult education, web-based seminar, synchronous online learning, virtual classroom

INTRODUCTION

Internet remarked marvellous development in the last decade. Everyday lives of citizens of developed countries are more or less influenced by the Internet and modern technologies. If used wisely, it can save time, money and energy. This thesis is focused on Internet's usage in education or more specifically on online education.

There are many terms used for online education. Some of them are for instance virtual education, Internet based education, web-based education, or education via computer-mediated communication. One of the most used definition of online education is based on Keegan's (1988) definition of distance education. That means that online education is characterized by the separation of teachers and learners, which distinguishes it from face-to-face education. There is also the influence of an educational organization, which distinguishes it from self-study and private tutoring. Online education is also defined by the use of a computer network, which presents or distributes some educational content. It also provides two-way communication via a computer network and therefore students may benefit from communication with each other, lecturers, teachers, and staff.

This thesis is focused on online education and one of the key terms used in this thesis is virtual classroom. Virtual classroom, or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is crucial tool for providing online education. Virtual learning environment is a term that to some extent is used instead of Learning Management System (LMS). These two terms have more or less the same meaning, however one may argue that Virtual Learning Environment focuses less on the specific features related to the management of learning. Hall (2001) defines learning environment as a „software designed as an all-in-one solution that can facilitate online learning for an organization. It includes the functions of a learning management system for those courses within the learning environment, but it may not be able to track online courses that were not created within this particular learning environment“. A learning environment in general is characterized by an interface that allows students to register, enroll into and take

courses, staying within that environment for the duration of the given course (in this thesis online course is rather called as web seminar, or webinar). The program usually includes some self-instructional portions. Most learning environments also include some authoring capability for creation of additional courses for the lector.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the diploma thesis is to introduce the terms of education of adults and online learning in general and to prove the importance of online learning as a tool for more accessible education for adults. The aim of the thesis is to provide information about the possibilities offered by synchronous online learning, evaluate the methods used and to present the main advantages and disadvantages. Another goal is to design recommendations for making the course more effective and efficient. The practical part shows how synchronous online learning works in practice in detail. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are compared in SWOT analysis.

HYPOTHESES

The two main methodological instruments are used in the diploma thesis. The first one is participating in the online course and processing a case study with the use of own observations. The second one is a survey among educators of adults. Middle lengths questionnaires with 11 questions will be given to the focus group. The main hypotheses are:

- 1) Online synchronous learning represents full-valued type of education of adults with the same efficiency as the traditional way of education of adults.
- 2) Preparation of the lecturer is very time consuming in order to provide a quality teaching.

METHODOLOGY

The first part of the diploma thesis is the theoretical part and the secondary data were gathered from books, literature and various online resources. This way, all important definitions and terms were clarified and explained. The second part of the diploma thesis is the theoretical part. Methodology for the practical part consists of a case study processed in the frame of a European project about education of adults and teaching them how to teach online. Evaluation of the implemented case study and suggestions and recommendations are included. Survey among educators of adults will be undertaken and the results will be evaluated. Focus of the survey is usage of virtual rooms and webinars. The SWOT analysis will be concluded based on the participation in the online course in the form of a web-based seminar (webinar), own observations and results of the survey.

CONCLUSION

Synchronous online education is currently full of possibilities for the realization of online education while such contact resembles the traditional classed thanks to its capabilities. In the Czech Republic, synchronous e-learning is in the beginnings, but in the field of non-formal education we can talk about relatively broad opportunities to participate in various even international webinars.

To make the training using virtual classrooms effective, it is necessary to ensure good preparation of the lecturer, to respect the principles of work in the chosen online environment and to achieve maximum certainty in controlling all the features that are provided. At the same time it is very crucial to be prepared to solve any possible problems. It depends on the transformation of education offerings, which can be implemented just online in many cases. Virtual classrooms can be considered as computer software that enables complex synchronous communication, but their use still does not meet the high expectations that are attributed to synchronous e-learning. This is primarily because of the shortage of supply of such a type of education on the Internet and the gradual computerization of society with an uneven impact on different socio-economic impact on the population. Another important outcome is the fact that it always depends on the attitudes of lecturers and their access to modern information and

communication technologies that are offered to them. It will thus depend not only on the activities of the state and project activities, but also on lecturers and students themselves, how they will approach the issue of online education via the Internet.

In the future, it is necessary to monitor new trends and linking of functional e-learning systems with other means of the Internet communication. Education in 21st century is facing many challenges and difficult tasks and those tools can significantly contribute or help with the solution. It is important to require high quality of this kind of contact and at the same time not to expect that online learning will replace the classical encounters of people. In this sense is synchronous online learning a very effective supplement to existing forms of education being one of the possible bases for work of educators and their students.

Online synchronous learning model is for adults and their learning needs an opportunity for both the online communication and collaboration implemented in the social context of real-time, which is certainly desirable in lifelong learning. This way computers do not fulfil only the role of a "learning machine", but they play the role of a mean to full interpersonal communication and education.

This diploma thesis responds to innovation in the field ICT and contributes to the current understanding of the development and use of webinars in lifelong learning.

Finally, the first hypothesis that online synchronous learning represents full-valued type of adult education with the same efficiency as the traditional way of adult education was confirmed. But with the note, that only in certain branches and with certain subjects and issues. The second hypothesis that the preparation of the lecturer is very time consuming in order to provide a quality teaching was also confirmed. And not only that, thoroughly preparation is also crucial for successful teaching. The lecturer has to be prepared for a range of different situations and in the virtual environment is no time for improvisation.

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