



Distance Learning Education in IP Fields for Students in Economics

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to consider the distance learning in the field of intellectual property. Distance learning is no longer something new and unknown in higher education, however, it remains an unloved and used form of teaching only as a last resort. Its positive aspects can be very successfully applied in intellectual property education. There are not many universities in the world that offer intellectual property education, and most of those that offer it deal only with the basic and legal aspects of intellectual property, without going into the depths of this vast but also so interesting and a discipline obligatory for modern education. In the process of learning students are provided with all the necessary teaching materials, as well as additional and enriching literature, including books, extracts from various literary sources, case studies and tasks for self-preparation and more. The online form of education provides the same opportunities as face-to-face education in conducting discussions and analyzing ideas and opportunities in the field of intellectual property. The difference is that people from all over the world can now get involved, who can offer different perspectives and give real examples from their countries, thus enriching the knowledge and culture of their fellow students. Distance learning is the way in which intellectual property can reach anyone who wants to learn about it, giving them the opportunity to study it, no matter where in the world they are, as long as they have a computer and an Internet connection.

The article discusses the possibilities for studying the discipline of intellectual property in distance learning, its positive and possible negative aspects. The necessity of providing an opportunity and carrying out distance learning in intellectual property is also considered.

Keywords: *Distance learning, intellectual property, E-learning, IP Rights*

1. Introduction

With the development of technology and the transition to a digital and virtual economy, opportunities for development have increased significantly. The development of globalization and economic networks is embracing more and more people around the world, giving them access to more and more diverse education, in different directions, as well as opportunities for qualification and retraining that will allow people to lead a descent way of life in this technological world.

The role of education and knowledge is increasingly important today, becoming a major economic resource. Increasing the world's educated population allows for the improvement of global, economic, social and cultural development. Greater education leads to lower unemployment, improved quality of life, sustainable economic growth and the elimination of world poverty and inequality.

"The number of higher education institutions in the world offering distance learning programs has increased significantly over the last two decades, and in most countries there is an increase in distance learning enrollment." [5]

A basic requirement for the development of humanity is that education is accessible to all people in all regions of the world. However, due to different social, cultural and economic developments, it is difficult to achieve this in real time. Distance learning is the way in which this problem can be solved.

2. Ways to implement distance learning

Distance learning is part of the educational field, which focuses on the use of teaching methods and technologies in order to provide training, on an individual or group basis, to persons who are not physically present in the traditional educational environment as a classroom. Distance learning



is described as "the process of creating and providing access to learning when the source of information and learners are separated by time and distance, or both".[6]

Modern technologies provide a wide range of opportunities for the use of various methods and ways through which to carry out distance learning. In general, four categories of technologies can be distinguished - written, audio, computer and video technologies.

Distance learning allows the educational process to be conducted by teachers who are distant in time and space from the learners, and the learning process itself can take two forms - synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous training refers to „a mode of transmission in which all participants are present at the same time. It resembles traditional classroom teaching methods, although participants are distant. Scheduling is required.”[2] In the asynchronous form of training, learners „have access to course materials on their own schedule, which allows flexibility. Learners are not required to be together at the same time.”[2]

In practice, the two forms of training are usually combined, and learners are most often provided with written materials and guidance on how to reach other online content they need for the learning process, via online links. At the same time, through the synchronous form of training, lectures and discussions are held, in real time, online through specialized video conferencing platforms and applications.

Distance learning can be extremely useful not only for pupils and students from regions with limited access to education, but also as a way to qualify and retrain current and future employees in various private or public companies. With subsidiaries in different countries, the parent company can offer additional training courses to local employees of its subsidiaries by providing them with distance learning instead of requiring them to make expensive and time-consuming trips and stays in another country.

3. Advantages and disadvantages of distance learning

The benefits that distance learning offers include opportunities to increase access to training, qualification, retraining and personal development. Leads to improvements in the quality of educational resources used in the learning process, increases the quality and diversity of different educational structures, while enabling the improvement and consolidation of the capacity of educational institutions. The main advantage of the distance learning form is its convenience, as it allows the whole learning process to take place at home, where learners would feel most comfortable. Providing the opportunity for asynchronous learning, allows learners to have access to materials and resources at any time they want, on an individual basis, chosen by them, wherever they are in the world, as long as they have access to the Internet . Hence another major advantage of distance learning, namely that it is quite accessible and requires little or no cost. The availability of a wide range of learning materials diversifies learners and enables them to learn in different, individually convenient ways - some learn better through visual stimulation, others through listening, and still others through the use of computer programs. Distance learning also allows more introverted people to express themselves, who are afraid to take part and ask questions in real presence [4].

Distance learning enables people from different countries, with different cultures, lifestyles, languages, ages, religions, etc., to connect and communicate with each other, to exchange knowledge and ideas, to make contacts and friendships, eliminating inequalities between them, providing education to a wide and diverse audience, while allowing them to combine education with work and family life.

Despite its many advantages, distance learning also has its drawbacks, which institutions and learners need to be aware of and which they must try to overcome.

The implementation of distance learning requires advance planning. Time is required for both teachers and learners to ensure that all tasks provided for in the educational course are completed on time. Although in most cases distance learning is not costly, there are exceptions that include, for example, expensive and difficult internet access and even electricity, the availability of a computer, things that in some parts of the world may not be so easy, affordable processing or delivery costs, etc. When conducting asynchronous learning, there is no immediate feedback, as there is in real attendance in a classroom or in synchronous learning. The learning process is more effort-intensive and involves more work for teachers, who need to prepare the materials and resources that will be provided to learners for their education. They will also be required to invest time and effort in supporting and training learners. In some educational specialties, although the learning process takes place in distance form, it is necessary at the end of the educational period to make a real physical presence in the classroom, and sometimes the successful completion of education requires assessment of the practical implementation of tasks, which can only take place in the present form. It



is also possible that not all employers recognize the diploma of completed distance learning. One of the most significant disadvantages of distance learning is the lack of social contacts and the isolation that people suffer. Oral communication and verbal interaction between teachers and learners and between learners themselves are not sufficiently practiced too.

4. Distance learning of intellectual property

With the growing importance of intellectual property, which is proven in a number of publications, including those of the author[1], in the modern world, the need to provide sufficient and adequate education in this field is growing. Intellectual property education is not widespread enough in the world, and in most universities and educational institutions offering such education, it extends only to its legal aspects and in no way affects its economic and financial nature, nor goes deep into the essence of the objects of intellectual property and their great importance for the economic and social development of the world.

In order to achieve a more balanced and development-oriented IP system, both internationally and nationally, that is sustainable and effective in the long term, it is necessary to integrate and develop intellectual property training, which to reach as many people in the world as possible. [2]

The few educational institutions in the world that offer full training in intellectual property cannot provide sufficient support for those wishing to acquire knowledge in this field through traditional teaching methods and physical presence. This is where distance learning comes into play, enabling people from all over the world to study in this very interesting and at the same time vital field of economics.

The author's experience in distance learning in intellectual property, which is held at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) in Sofia, Bulgaria, has shown that this way of teaching students is extremely appropriate, successful and much desired by students.

During the learning process, students are provided with a variety of written materials from which they can prepare, and the selection of materials is made in a way that allows students to easily understand and comprehend the studied matter. At the same time, students are given the opportunity to send their questions and comments online or via email, thus providing fast and timely communication between the teacher and students, and often receive interesting and mutually supportive discussions on interesting and relevant topics.

Students are also provided with guides and online links to access the official websites of major and important institutions related to intellectual property, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization, the European Patent Office, the Bulgarian Patent Office and others.

Students are provided with tests and cases for self-preparation on each of the topics covered in the learning process, and after solving them they are evaluated, and those of them who performed best are awarded special certificates issued jointly by the Department of "Intellectual property and technology transfer" and the World Intellectual Property Organization, for the successful completion of the educational course.

The education itself is conducted in a combined form - synchronous and asynchronous. The asynchronous form is that students can, at any time they decide, from anywhere in the world, access the teaching materials, tests and cases for self-preparation provided to them. The asynchronous form shows all its positive aspects, providing flexibility in the learning process for both the teacher and the students. Both parties in the learning process do not need an online presence on a strict schedule, everyone can access the distance learning platform at any time, when there is a desire and opportunity, without interfering with his personal and social commitments. The asynchronous form is a supplement to synchronous teaching through online lectures, helping and significantly enriching the whole process.

The synchronous form, on the other hand, is expressed in the weekly online lectures on the subject, through a specialized program for video conferencing. Through the lectures the students are acquainted with each of the existing objects of intellectual property, with their economic and legal aspects, their role in the modern world, the ways to be legally protected, etc. During the videoconference lectures there is a direct, live connection between the teacher and the students, during which there is communication and discussion between the participants. Students have the opportunity to ask their questions directly, and the teacher can give an answer immediately. The disadvantage of the synchronous form of education is the requirement to adhere to a fixed schedule according to which the lectures are held and the presence of the teacher and students in an online environment is required. This disadvantage is overcome by recording the lecture, which is then provided to students through the distance learning platform used by the university. Thus, students can

listen to the lecture in case they could not attend live. The advantage of listening to the lecture live in its synchronous form is the ability to directly ask questions and participate in discussions.

The availability of synchronous learning through videoconferencing lectures allows the lectures to include specialists and experts from the relevant field of intellectual property, to acquaint students with the secrets and specifics of a profession or object of intellectual property, to tell about their practical experience and give advice and guidance to students for their future development. In traditional classroom education, the presence of specialists and experts from practice is not always possible due to their busy daily lives and the need to adjust the schedule, but the availability of distance learning allows such problems to be minimized and the expert to include in the lecture, no matter where in the world they are and without having to actually be present in the classroom.

"In many countries around the world, teaching materials in intellectual property disciplines are often prepared by teachers themselves. This is a time-consuming task that requires significant effort not only to search, select and edit materials, but also to keep them up to date. Lack of experience often leads to lower quality materials. But the responsibility for the preparation of teaching materials has another drawback. While a general IP teacher can easily choose one of the many textbooks and manage the teaching of one of the specific areas of IP, this cannot happen in a system where teachers have to create a whole IP program from the beginning. One can easily understand the impact this has on the variety of IP courses offered to students." [8] This significant problem, existing in many countries around the world, is solved in the teaching of intellectual property at UNWE, through the presence of experts and specialists from all fields of intellectual property in the academic staff of the department. Of course, this does not preclude the obligation of the academic staff to select, maintain and update the teaching materials used in the teaching process, which are provided to students.

The final examinations in the disciplines covering the field of intellectual property and carried out in a distance form of education are also conducted remotely, again being conducted in a combined synchronous and asynchronous form. What part of the final exams will be conducted synchronously and what part asynchronously depends on the specific discipline. In general, asynchronous form is always the transmission of term papers, essays, assignments and other types of student work, which are subsequently defended by the student or group of students who worked on them, in synchronous form by videoconference. A small part of the final exams, which are in the form of a test, are conducted in asynchronous form. Whether this final test will be in asynchronous or synchronous form depends on the discipline. Most of these final exams in the form of a test are conducted in synchronous form, during a video conference call in an online environment. Asynchronous testing allows students to start the exam at a convenient time for them, as these tests have a fixed time range and can be completed only once, which excludes the possibility of fraud.

5. Conclusion

As the only educational institution in Bulgaria, and the main one providing education in intellectual property, UNWE specializes in providing high quality and effective education in intellectual property. The university strives to make the intellectual property education program a leader in the Balkans and among the main ones at the European level. The high quality of education is guaranteed by the joint work of the university with the World Intellectual Property Organization and the high evaluation it receives from it, as well as with the program for joint education of students and professionals, conducted jointly by the two institutions.

The practice at UNWE has shown that distance learning is a successful and desirable form of education, which provides a good enough level of education, fully equivalent to traditional ways of learning, and intellectual property education fully corresponds to the practice of distance learning and is fully appropriate to be conducted in such a form.

"Recent changes in distance learning have introduced more modern technological methods, such as video and audio conferencing, recorded lectures, satellite, e-mail, live chat and Internet databases. The traditional distance learning regime has been complemented by these multimedia devices and teaching methods to allow for a better bypass and interactive connection, closer to the traditional classroom method and at a much lower cost." [7]

The availability of distance learning at the university allows a large number of people to receive quality and reliable intellectual property education without having to actually attend the university, and may even be located in another country. It is quite possible to assume that distance learning is the future of the education system, and that its development will continue, and its improvement will contribute to education reaching absolutely every corner of the world, enabling people to have a brighter future.



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