

# Peculiarities of Verbalisation of Emotions by the Teachers in Distance Learning

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to identify and categorise the lexical units denoting teachers' emotions in the context of distance learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Research methods: discourse and content analysis, categorisation, questionnaire "The emotional aspects and attitudes of teachers to various aspects of reform in secondary education". The sample consisted of 413 teachers (90.3% female) who participated in an online survey. Teachers taught at different educational levels (i.e., elementary, middle and secondary schools). They completed self-report questionnaire that assessed their feelings towards remote learning. Predominantly positive and sthenic emotions (interest and joy) were reported regarding distance learning. The perception of online learning as the only possible form has changed teachers' discourse regarding interaction with students: there was a shift from positive emotions towards negatively marked asthenic lexical units (disappointment, anxiety and disapproval). The emotional component of teachers' attitudes towards online learning was characterised as undifferentiated in the beginning of distance learning. As teachers' involvement in online learning increased, the share of respondents with an indifferent attitude decreased, while the share with a positive attitude towards this innovation - increased. Teachers' discourse is characterised by a positive emotional connotation at the start of online learning; however, the awareness of the inevitability of such a format led to the predominance of negatively marked, asthenic emotions. A decrease was measured in the frequency of such lexical units such as "interest" and "joy", while "confidence in oneself" has sharply increased.

**Keywords:** *attitudes, on-line communication, discourse, emotions, pandemic, verbalisation.*

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## 1. Introduction

The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic need to transfer social communication in all of its contexts to the distance mode. As a result, online communication has become increasingly present in almost everyone's lives. In the context of education, online learning has recently gained mass status, becoming computer-mediated. Thus, information technology has become that link enabling subject-subject interaction in education. All these factors have exposed and aggravated the problem of unpreparedness for such changes in the Ukrainian public education sector. Unsurprisingly, these unexpected changes caused a wide range of emotional reactions among participants in the educational process (teachers, students and parents).

Our analysis of the current social situation in the education system allowed us to highlight the following factors, influencing the teacher-student communication process: social uncertainty, sense of permanent instability and rapid emergence of various forms and means of organising the educational process. These factors cause a loss of control over the education process among communicators, destabilise their psycho-emotional sphere and produce strain and resistance. In other words, communicators feel powerless to engage in communication, as well as control the ways in which communication takes place. As confirmed by the discourse analysis of online learning participants presented in this paper.

Emotions are fundamental predictors of the behaviours that allow understanding of individuals' attitudes toward significant social phenomena and personal life events, analysis of certain emotional patterns and prediction of the course of communication. In our study, we analyse the affective sphere of teachers in the context of online learning due to the need understand the real-life situation in which these communicators act, and, if necessary, to provide them with timely socio-psychological support. Emotions are a subject of research in many scientific disciplines, including anthropology and psycholinguistics; areas of psychotherapy such as cognitive-behavioural and emotionally-focused therapy; and separate branches of psychology such as - general psychology, psychophysiology, psychology of personality, social psychology, and so on. As the concept of emotion is addressed in a the cross-disciplinary field of study, new findings might be of practical value to a wide range of scholars.

## 2. Research background

### 2.1. Literature review

Many prominent psychologists have studied emotions (Ilyin, 2018; Izard, 2007; Vilyunas, 1976 and others). The concept of “emotion” is a relevant subject of study in cognitive linguistics and is widely investigated within the anthropological linguistic paradigm (Danylenko, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 2004; Shahovskij, 2008; Vezhbitska, 1996). The study of emotions from the cognitive perspective reveals the relationships between the components of the general cognitive picture of communication between subjects; these relationships form a new discourse in the context of distance learning. These components include language units, emotional reactions and metalinguistic environments that reveal themselves through the process of verbalisation.

In psycholinguistics, emotions are studied during the subjects’ communication through analysis of the emotional and volitional spheres of the personality (Fomina, 2019). Mikhalchuk and Onufrieva (2020) support this approach and underline that the most relevant area of modern cognitive linguistics is the study of concepts, including the concept of emotions. Many scientists understand the verbalised emotional concept as a complex, dynamic structural-semantic construction that is a product of human consciousness. In connection to this, add that the specificity of the verbalised emotional concept is determined by a set of ethnocultural and social determinants; distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic represents an example of a social determinant.

Emotions have also been studied through the analysis of metaphors by assessing and describing prototype components. Study of the peculiarities of teachers’ perceptions of educational innovations has shown that most of the lexical units obtained during the content analysis belong to the category of “animals”, and the evaluative component is dominated by negatively marked attitudes to innovation (Ungar, 2016). Schmidt and Datnow (2005) analysed the process of teachers’ emotional-sense-making in the context of educational innovations, while Safronov et al. (2018) studied the teachers’ attitudes to educational reforms in the post-Soviet period. These scholars used a narrative approach that reconstructed teachers’ recollections in order to identify recurrent representational patterns related to the changes in education between the 1980s and 1990s. Their work emphasised that the cultural and social changes that took place in that historical period triggered an outburst of emotions among teachers, wherein their attitude towards the use of the Internet in the educational process changed from sceptical to

positive. In fact, the problem of online learning has become a topic of scientific discussion in many different ways: emotions are examined in connection with students' stress or satisfaction during online learning (Bojan & Bentz, 2021; Valieiev et al., 2021), emotional and cognitive presence during online lessons (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005), global educational challenges and educational paradigm shifts (Diehl, 2020).

In terms of communication, A. Vezhbitska's scenario approach offers an interesting interpretation of emotions. In accordance with this approach, native speakers tend to use particular accepted emotional patterns (scenarios) in their reactions to certain stimuli. Description of the cognitive pattern of emotions is given by the speaker with the help of universal lexical units, and interpretation of emotional concepts - using intuitive in their understanding words, rather than specific names of emotions or emotional states (Vezhbitska, 1996). This approach needs to be explained in accordance with the psychological paradigm: subjects' ability to accurately identify and verbalise their own emotions is a criterion for achieving a certain level of emotional literacy, in contrast to subjects trying to categorise their emotional responses by using vague and unclear names for emotions. Nevertheless, A. Vezhbitska's scenario approach allows emotional reactions to be understood as universal human phenomenon, and their understanding is possible through the reconstruction of certain emotional patterns in a subject's language.

Gilmore and Warren (2007) analysed the transformation of teachers' emotions when using virtual means of communication at school. They have found that characteristics of virtual communication, such as incomplete images of one's body and the lack of physical socio-spatial indicators (i.e., the incomplete paralinguistic semiotic system), force individuals to change their usual emotional responses, which make teachers' online discourse more emotional in the sense that they overcompensate with their emotional indicators. Thus, teachers compensate for the lack of live (face-to-face) communication by strengthening the metalinguistic characteristics of their speech.

Theoretical and methodological analysis has shown that emotions involve various aspects of phenomenology, which raises problems of differences in interdisciplinary interpretations and approaches to understanding emotional phenomena. To clarify the terms at stake in this paper, we briefly describe the relationship between the basic conceptual categories that we operate in this work. On the basis of evolutionary characteristics, emotions can be divided into the following:

1) emotional tone - a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, pleasant or unpleasant, which is denoted by such lexical units such as “emotional experience”. Emotional sensory tone can be funny, boring, tender, etc.;

2) actual emotions - these reveal the evaluative attitude of the individual toward current or possible situations. In contrast to emotional tone, these are fairly specific states that arise in response to the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of a particular need and perform regulatory and meaningful functions (including interest - excitement, joy, surprise; grief - suffering, anger, disgust, contempt, shame, love, etc.). This group of emotional phenomena includes affects (strong, short-lived, often uncontrollable emotional manifestations that occur in response to an unexpected and emergency situation), passions, moods, stress and frustration.

3) feelings (moral, intellectual and aesthetic) belong to a separate subgroup in the structure of emotional phenomena.

In our study, we focus mainly on actual emotions and emotional tone because of our procedure and methods, which are based on the “need theory” of emotions wherein the quality of an emotion is considered from the standpoint of behavioural efficiency. In addition, we use the theory of cognitive dissonance by Festinger, according to which a positive emotional reaction happens when an action plan does not encounter obstacles in its path. Negative emotions occur due to the discrepancy between the current activity (online learning) and the expected result (the quality of educational communication).

One group of scientists (Semichenko, 2004, etc.) argue that tension is the most important characteristic of a teacher’s work. Besides, many scientists have noted the high incidence of neurotic and psychosomatic disorders among teachers due to their stressful job (Hargreaves, 2000; Kelchtermans, 2005; Nias, 1999; Scherban, 2004). Under the influence of the pandemic and distance learning, teachers have experienced additional psycho-emotional stress, as evidenced by data obtained by numerous scientists. During the COVID-19 crisis, teachers have often characterised themselves using the following lexical items: scared, worried, depressed and sad (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020; Yu & Zhang, 2021). Thus, online learning in times of crisis is a real global challenge that can accelerate teachers’ emotional burnout and, consequently, fill teachers’ discourse with negatively marked lexical units. Hence, the purpose of our study was to identify and categorise lexical units denoting teachers’ emotions in the context of

distance learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. The objectives were as follows:

- identify lexical units of teachers' discourse that denote emotions based on analysis of empirical data;
- categorise obtained lexical units according to polarity (positive/negative) and activity (sthenic/asthenic).

At the morphological level, emotions are expressed through words. The material of the study consists of the lexical units obtained during an online survey of members of the teaching community to investigate their emotional reactions to the remote educational process due to the quarantine regime. According to the selected categories, we systematised and analysed the lexical units obtained during the empirical part of the study in which teachers described their emotions towards online learning.

## ***2.2. Methods***

The research methodology included M. Kanibolotska's questionnaire "The emotional aspects and attitudes of teachers to various aspects of reforms in secondary education", which was presented to respondents via Google forms. The questionnaire included a block of open questions related to teachers' emotional reactions to distance learning, such as: "During distanced lessons, I feel..." and "When the distance learning became the only possibility during quarantine, I felt..." The first question elicited general emotions in the context of a new social and educational challenge, and the second question revealed respondents' key emotions in the current situation. The questionnaire also included questions aimed at identifying teachers' attitudes towards distance learning in order to determine their readiness for it as well as the emotional tone of online communication.

Content analysis was chosen as the main method for studying lexical units and establishing the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the teachers' discourse regarding online learning. This method is among of the main psycho-semantic instruments used in psychological and psycholinguistic research. In addition, we used cognitive-discursive interpretation of the studied phenomena according to the following criteria: polarity, activity and intensity.

## **3. Qualitative Data Analysis and Results**

The online survey was conducted during the first quarantine in Ukraine (9 April - 8 May 2020) in secondary schools in the cities of Volyn, Dnipro, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhia, Poltava, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Mykolaiv, Rivne, Khmelnytsky, Kherson and; Cherkasy cities as well as other educational

institutions within the Ukrainian experiment “Formation of positive public opinion on educational innovations in educational institutions of different levels” (in accordance with the order of the Ministry of Education and Science №27 from 11/01/2019). Processing and calculation of survey results was performed in Microsoft Excel and SPSS 20 using descriptive statistics.

During this period, we received 418 responses, five of which were invalid and subsequently excluded from further analysis. Therefore, 413 responses were used as the basic data for the research. The demographic characteristics: the sample consisted of 373 female and 40 male respondents. Respondents’ age distribution included 108 people under the age of 35, 136 people aged 36-46 and 169 people over the age of 46. In terms of role in the educational process, respondents included: 117 primary school teachers, 227 secondary school teachers, 35 school administration employees and principals, 34 psychologists and social workers. The data are displayed in Table. 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample (in %)

Gender		Age		Educational Role	
Male:	9.7%	Under 35:	26.2%	Primary school:	28.2%
Female:	90.3%	Between 36-46:	32.9%	Secondary school:	55%
		over 46:	40.9%	Administration:	8.5%
				Psychologists and others:	8.2%

Teachers’ attitudes towards distance learning were gathered through the following questions: “What was your attitude to distance learning before quarantine?” and “What is your attitude to distance learning now during quarantine?” The distribution of the answers to the first question was as follows: negative attitude - 11.7% (48 people), neutral - 72.8% (301 people), positive - 15.5% (64 people). Thus, most respondents had a neutral attitude towards distance learning before the start of the quarantine. Regarding the attitudes to online learning during quarantine, the results were as follows: negative attitude - 18.2% (75 people), neutral attitude - 30% (124 people), positive attitude - 51.8% (214 people). It therefore becomes apparent that as teachers entered the distance learning format, the share of those whose attitudes were undifferentiated (neutral) decreased, while the share of those

who had positive attitudes to online learning during quarantine activities increased. We believe that this shift is actually normal and is associated with the activation of adaptive coping mechanisms that regulate the vector of teachers' attitudes by helping them become used to the circumstances or to develop constructive strategies for mastering this innovative form of learning and emotional and volitional self-regulation.

We also aimed to gain an overview of teachers' emotions regarding distance learning. As the category of analysis we chose lexical units such as nouns denoting an emotional reaction (i.e., an actual emotion or emotional state), we grouped some lexical units with similar semantic meaning into a single category for analysis. For example, such lexical units as "sadness" and "disappointment" were grouped into one category called "disappointment". We combined "anxiety" and "agitation" into the category of "anxiety" and nouns like "anger" and "rage" into the category of "anger". Thus, based on our empirical data and grouping procedure, we identified 11 categories of analysis: interest, confidence, joy, anxiety, denial, disappointment, anger, disapproval, fatigue, hope and despair. Each of these categories featured the following subcategories: 1) polarity (negative or positive) and 2) activity: sthenic, i.e., enhancing the activation of emotion; and asthenic, i.e., suppressing activity). The details of the results are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Teachers' emotional manifestations during distance learning (quantitative and qualitative characteristics)

Category of analysis: lexical unit (noun)	Subcategory: polarity/activity	Absolute and relative frequency (%)
Interest	positive, sthenic	221 (53.5%)
Confidence	positive, sthenic	10 (2.4%)
Joy	positive, sthenic	22 (5.3%)
Anxiety	negative, asthenic	63 (15.3%)
Denial of emotions	negative, asthenic	36 (8.7%)
Disappointment	negative, asthenic	27 (6.5%)
Anger	negative, sthenic	23 (5.6%)
Disapproval	negative, asthenic	9 (2.2%)
Fatigue	negative, asthenic	2 (0.5%)

According to the subcategories of polarity and activity, we identified 253 positive, sthenic emotions and emotional states (confidence, joy,



interest) and 160 negatively marked emotional manifestations that suppressed the teacher's activity (anxiety, denial of emotions, frustration, anger, disapproval, fatigue). According to our content analysis, the most common emotional state in the answers was interest, which was identified in 53.5% of responses. Interest is a basic human emotion and has a positive nature. Interest, together with cognitive structures and orientations, directs a person towards cognition and action, especially in novel situations like that of distance learning. Among negative emotions, teachers most often mentioned anxiety (15.3%).

There was also another surprising lexical unit ("nothing") that emerged in responses concerning teachers' emotions during the distance learning. We combined the items related to "nothing" into one category, namely "denial of emotions". The semantic load of this unit can be explained through the protective psychological mechanism of denial, which allows a person to cope with an event, causing anxiety. However, the disadvantage of denial is that it blocks emotional interpretation of the event, resulting in the subject's loss of important information. In our context, such an answer indicates a reluctance to be emotionally involved in new forms of the learning process, indicating the presence of an internal barrier to discussing this topic that disturbs the respondent. However, we decided not to place this lexical unit into the category of "anxiety" because in the latter case, the subject is able to clearly categorise their emotional state. In general, we received more positively labelled emotional reactions to the first open-ended question, "During distanced lessons, I feel..." This means that distance learning stimulated teachers and created a friendly emotional tone for online teacher-student communications.

Regarding our analysis of emotional reactions to the inevitability of distance learning, we obtained a total of 203 positive emotions, which had an amplifying, facilitating effect, and 210 negative, asthenic emotions. The details of the results are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Emotional manifestations of teachers about the fact that distance learning became the only possibility during quarantine (quantitative and qualitative characteristics)

Category of analysis: lexical unit (noun)	Subcategory: polarity/activity	Absolute and relative frequency (%)
Confidence	positive, sthenic	148 (36%)
Interest	positive, sthenic	29 (7%)

Joy	positive, sthenic	13 (3%)
Hope	positive, sthenic	7 (1.7%)
Satisfaction	positive, sthenic	6 (1.5%)
Disappointment	negative, asthenic	73 (17.7%)
Anxiety	negative, asthenic	55 (13.3%)
Despair	negative, asthenic	16 (3.9%)
Anger	negative, asthenic	13 (3.1%)
Disapproval	negative, asthenic	25 (6.1%)
Fatigue	negative, asthenic	17 (4.1%)
Denial of emotions	negative, asthenic	11 (2.6%)

The content analysis revealed that the most common emotional reaction to the quarantine situation in the second question was a state of “confidence” (mentioned 148 times, representing 36% of the total number of lexical units). Interestingly, as soon as distance learning became the only possible means of communication in the educational process, teachers’ confidence increased significantly. For comparison, emotional states like “confidence” occurred in the answers to the first question in only 2.4% of cases. The repertoire of emotional manifestations also expanded slightly, with the emergence of “hope”, “satisfaction” and “despair”.

Generally, the second question (“When distance learning became the only possibility during quarantine, I felt...”) was characterised by more negatively marked emotions; this indicates an increase in stress and a negative emotional tone during the process of online learning.

More specifically, teachers’ discourse included lexical units such as “despair”, indicating extreme levels and increased intensity of emotions like “disappointment”, along with an increase in its intensity among a certain group of teachers. Thus, as teachers became aware that distance learning was the only possibility, there was an increase in the frequency of emotions like “disappointment”, “disapproval” and “fatigue”. At the same time, there was a significant decrease in the frequency of positive, sthenic emotions like interest, confidence and joy. On the other hand, the completely new lexical units of “hope” and “satisfaction” also emerged, but their frequency among the total number of lexical units was rather low at - 1.7% and 1.5%, respectively.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The transformations that have taken place in the field of online communication and learning involve a number of objective processes happening in the field of education: blended learning, active inclusion of special platforms in teacher-student communication, electronic resources that force participants to master new tools for knowledge transmission. In addition to these transformations, during the COVID-19 pandemic teachers have also been affected by school closures and higher risk of job loss at educational institutions or governmental education agencies as a result of budget cuts (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021). All of these factors place a great responsibility on teachers and school administrations, leading to additional psychological pressure. Not every teacher is knowledgeable about remote learning methodologies, and many require some form of assistance, including psychological support. Teachers are expected to engage in educational communication in a new, non-traditional, distance format and, to simultaneously involve both children and parents in this format. The unexpected effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public education sector have provoked a wave of diverse emotions among participants in the educational process. This emotional outburst manifests itself in teacher's speech through lexical units. According to the results of this study, teachers' attitudes towards the transition to distance learning are mixed and inconsistent, and tend towards negativity.

In accordance with our study aim, we categorised lexical units according to polarity and activity to assess teachers' emotional reactions to the introduction of distance learning as well as understand their readiness to accept this challenge of modern education; this allowed us to characterise emotional reactions into several groups: positive-sthenic (8), positive-asthenic (0), negative-sthenic (2) and, negative-asthenic (11).

Analysis of our empirical data revealed the following features of the emotional-cognitive system of respondents:

- 1) the predominance of positively marked emotions (61.2%) such as interest, joy and confidence, which had an activating and inspiring effect on teachers at the beginning of online learning;

- 2) change of the vector of emotional response in the opposite direction as soon as teachers realised the inevitability of the online format, resulting in the predominance of negatively marked, asthenic emotions (50.8%) and the emergence of lexical units that express greater intensity of emotional colour, such as despair and hope;

3) as soon as online learning became an integral part of teachers' reality, the labelling of emotions also changed: the frequency of "interest" (before quarantine - 53.5%, during quarantine - 7%) and "joy" (before - 5.3%, during - 3%) decreased, while there was a sharp increase in the marker "self-confidence" (before - 2.4%, during - 36%).

Overall, teachers' emotional and cognitive spheres in the context of global social challenges and reforms in education remains insufficiently studied in Ukraine, representing a gap for future research to address. Further research may aim to identify the features of teachers' discourse in the context of emotional responses in relation to their professional experience and competence.

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