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## **CANVAS LMS: OPPORTUNITIES AND FEATURES**

*The sphere of education has been recently facing gradual changes in approaches and attitudes of all its participants to the process of studying. Rapid digitalization together with global life challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic gets technology to be used together with traditional means of education in order to meet the needs of today's learners not only in a painless but also in a favourable way. The article considers the necessity to modernize the traditional process of studying and optimize it for learners, who deal with individual or forced distance study, caused by the pandemic as well. The up to date change implementation can be possibly accomplished with the help of specialized applications and web systems, particularly the online course platform Canvas, which stands in the focus of our paper. Previous studies and researches connected with similar and / or the same platform are mentioned briefly. The article also reveals technical capability and features of the Canvas system, presents the investigation of its conformity with students' current needs through our analysis of its advantages and disadvantages and describes its pros and cons not only from the point of view of students, who are considered to be the representatives of the main category or platform users, but also considering teachers' experience and impressions of*

*Canvas as a primary or a subsidiary educational system with courses. The readers of this article may get acquainted with the main elements of the Canvas platform structure, learn about their characteristics and decide whether to approve or disapprove such an alternative to outdated course attendance. Furthermore, the research includes a survey conducted among 50 students, who had already used the platform in appliance with their curriculum and were asked to share their impressions starting from logging in to giving an overall review of this concentration of online courses. In the final analysis we provide the readers of the article with a general conclusion about the platform, its conformity with the requirements of the educational system and learners' needs specifically.*

**Keywords:** *Canvas; digital technology; education; learning; online course.*

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**Introduction.** The global pandemic caused by Covid-19 has led to the necessity to make changes in the main spheres of human activity. The educational sphere, both in general and specifically in Ukraine, was subject to modifications; forced quarantine distance and individual training formats have become the main alternatives to the full-time one (Nalyvaiko, Zemlin, Vakulenko, 2020, 2021). What is more, the issue of the educational system conformity with the main needs of learners (Petranovskaja, 2019), including knowledge gaining, taking into account individuality, the composition of human thinking, and its peculiarities of information assimilation, was exacerbated. The relevance of materials and methods by which they are presented has been finally considered more seriously as well as attention to the educational time and resources spent during the educational process. All of the mentioned factors became the reason to turn to alternative applications and platforms, which greatly facilitate the process of obtaining knowledge, make it more interactive and effective (Nalyvaiko, 2019, 2020). One of the leading positions among such systems today is taken by the

platform of Mass Open Online Courses Canvas ([canvas.talantiuspeh.ru](https://canvas.talantiuspeh.ru); [instructure.com](https://instructure.com)), meeting the current educational needs of more than 30 million users (John, 2021).

The implementation of modern technologies and systems into the educational process has claimed attention of scientists all around the globe, making it necessary to conduct researches and experiments in order to analyze the influence of e-learning systems on students and their level knowledge, for example, as it is demonstrated in Taurai Rupere and Maria Jakovljevic's (2021) article. In the work "Usability and user evaluation of an integrated multimedia e learning management system" the researchers focus on multimedia used within traditional education and its influence on students and teachers (Rupere, Jakovljevic, 2021). Besides, more and more scientists draw the attention of society to students' attitude to online learning, challenges that they may face and results of such studying with the help of surveys about "habits of using mobile devices for taking online courses" (Milheim, Fraenza, Palermo-Kielb, 2021, p. 267), "key aspects of e-learning systems and programs and students' motivation" (Elshareif, Mohamed, 2021, p. 128) and "the impact of mobile device use on student engagement and success in online courses" (Nichter, 2021, p. 5). The comparison of capabilities of different learning platforms were investigated in the following study: "Postgraduate Students' Experiences on the Use of Moodle and Canvas Learning Management System" (Mpungose, Khoza, 2020).

As Canvas LMS is gradually taking one of the leading roles among other online course platforms, it gets more investigated, for instance: all possible specifications of its usage for foreign language learning are considered in such works as "Developing Arabic language instructional content in Canvas LMS for the era and post Covid-19 pandemic" (Fauzi, 2020) or "Utilizing Canvas in Technology Enhanced Language Learning Classroom: a Case Study" (Pujasari, Ruslan, 2021). The improvement of the understanding of educational material

effectiveness using the Canvas platform was considered in the dissertation study “Student Interaction Network Analysis on Canvas LMS” (Desai, 2020).

Though the majority of works on this topic are dedicated to students and their point of view considering Canvas, there are articles, which deal with teachers’ understanding of changing educational tendencies and their proficiency in work with the mentioned platform, for example “Teachers' Experiences towards Usage of Learning Management System: CANVAS” (Endozo, Oluyinka, Daenos, 2019).

**The Aims of the Study.** In this article, our attention is focused on the exploration of the interactive online platform Canvas LMS, namely its versions Canvas Free-for-Student and Canvas Free-for-Teacher, their opportunities as well as positive and negative features. Furthermore, the second goal of our work is to conduct a survey among potential users of the platform, who are at the center of the educational system, i.e. students, to corroborate or refute the information obtained in the process of analyzing Canvas functioning.

**Methods.** The study is based on data collected with the help of theoretical and experimental methods. The former include analysis of scientific articles and dissertation works on the topic of interactive platforms, especially Canvas, as well as the arrangement of colleagues’ findings and achievements. The used experimental methods include questionnaires, a survey, a review and evaluation of the corresponding obtained results.

**The Main Part of the Study.** The platform is conventionally divided into three main sectors: Canvas LMS, hereinafter referred to as Canvas, Canvas Studio and Canvas Catalog. In this paper, we suggest paying attention to the versions of the former above-mentioned system Canvas Free-for-Student and Canvas Free-for-Teacher, available for using online or in the format of a mobile application for both IOS, and Android users, namely considering their main characteristics and functioning. In order to become a user of the free version, a learner or a teacher should go to the official system website and register as an individual or

to the website of the educational institution in which Canvas is used as the main educational platform. The official website of the platform (<https://www.instructure.com/about>) makes potential users acquainted with the history of the creation and development of the main modules, provides them with video materials with feedback from users from around the world, including students of Ivy League universities, and has the functions of the platform described in detail (Canvas Overview Instructure, 2021). The latter include the simplicity and clarity of the interface; as well as the opportunity to study remotely at any time using any gadget with access to the Internet; work with documents, presentations, video and audio materials; receive objective assessments for completed tasks and tests as they are checked by a computerized system, making the correct answers visible immediately after the completion of the assessment (with the permission of the course teacher); communicate with the curator in real time by e-mail; participate in conferences, join group projects of the course in Google Docs format and even create an electronic portfolio. Reliable and high-quality work of the platform is ensured by regular component updates and its own cloud system.

The registration process in Canvas takes from one to five minutes and is extremely easy: the applicant has to fill the registration form in with their full name, username by which they would like to be identified, password, email address and code to the course provided by an instructor or a teacher. After successful authorization, the student can use the mobile version of Canvas by synchronizing the account with QR code and have access to open courses of the system in addition to the one to which they have received the invitation. Each time a user connects to their personal account, they will only need to provide a username and a password.

As soon as users sign in to their profile a dashboard will appear on a white background showing the courses that have been recently attended. The courses an applicant designates as "favorite" will also be presented in this section. In the

left corner of the page, you may see other sections, such as accounts, courses, calendar, inbox, history, and help. Let's consider each of them in great detail, especially from the point of view of learners (Canvas Free-for-Student users).

The account section gives the user access to all system messages as well as to advertisements related to the selected courses. There you can also choose and upload a profile photo, optionally add a biography and / or links to your other web pages or information about yourself and your own achievements, which the applicant considers appropriate to highlight in Canvas. The files subsection helps to easily access all documents uploaded to the system from the account, distribute them into thematic folders and quickly forward them to other users of the system. The platform allows you to save files with a total weight of up to 52.4 MB, which provides a number of opportunities for convenient work with the latter without using third-party applications and programs. Moreover, in the account section you can customize such necessary parameters as the language and the time zone of your profile; add to appropriate pronouns with which you correlate yourself to the personal account; synchronize it with the mobile version using a unique QR code or other available web tools; adjust Canvas functions for your own convenience, etc. In the same section you can get acquainted with the e-portfolio and options for creating your own portfolio based on the experience gained on courses, the best completed projects, ideas and decisions made while working on tasks, as well as share the latest with other users of the platform and even with potential future employers. Another useful feature which allows you to publish a finished portfolio or open access only to the owner of this account and only for personal usage including correction making.

Under the sections account and dashboard there is another useful section called courses, in which two clicks of the left mouse button can open a general list of courses chosen by a student or created by a teacher / tutor, placed in a column with minimal information about each of them. Each course can be viewed separately for important announcements connected with the educational process,

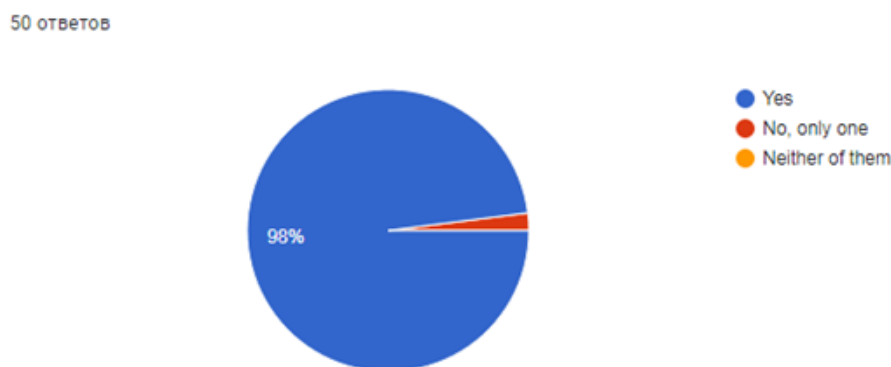
its structure, future verification works (schedule of attestation works and their assessments are located in the unit assignments). In addition, a learner has the opportunity to look through and perform existing tasks if the course curator has given access to them in advance and / or in the absence of a specific deadline; get acquainted with the received assessments and comments of teachers; participate in the discussion of the course or in conferences that can be joined in the Big Blue Button section inclusively. The number of participants is easily overviewed in the people subsection, where they are displayed alphabetically by the selected names and role designation in a particular course (teacher, supervisor or student). Names listed in the subsection are a direct link to the profiles of applicants on the platform, which, if necessary, can be viewed and / or used to send a letter. All files necessary for effective knowledge gaining and development of skills are stored in the next subsection (files). The course section also gives Canvas users access to the training program with a list of all scheduled classes, tasks and deadlines for completing the latter. For users' convenience, they have the opportunity to get acquainted with the described information in the section calendar, structured by blocks according to the week, month and curriculum and add reminders to the calendar if needed.

The inbox section is responsible for all correspondence that takes place within the platform and which is conditionally distributed according to the courses. If the account holder wants it is possible to use settings to synchronize notifications with the email and receive messages from Canvas directly there. History, the next section of the platform, provides information about recent activities in the user's personal account and helps to save time in searching for the necessary section if it has already been visited. Help also facilitates the process of familiarization with Canvas, contains answers to the most common questions about the system, and provides the users with the opportunity of quick communication with the teacher and the developers on the issue of possible questions, problems or suggestions. Furthermore, the word "Instructure" in the

lower left corner of the screen is a recently added hyperlink to the official website of Canvas, where its users may get acquainted with additional information about the company and its products.

**Results.** In order to test out the platform, its interface and functionality, 50 university students of the School of Foreign Languages, who had to work with the system according to the curriculum, were asked to consider the main aspects of Canvas usage and answer ten questions in Google Forms.

The answers to the first question show that almost all respondents have been acquainted with both versions of Canvas Free-for-Student for PCs and for gadgets, while only one survey participant has used one version (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. Have you used both versions of Canvas?**

The diagram below reveals that the majority of learners (90%) found the registration process simple and faced no difficulties with re-entering the profile. 2 % of responders found registration rather complicated and 8% stated that it was more challenging to log in Canvas later (Fig.2). According to the statistics (5 users have experienced such complications) and general complaints of platform users, one of the few errors may occur specifically at this juncture, as Figure 3 shows, when only indicating one's user name instead of the e-mail address into the login blank can renew access to the account.



50 ответов



**Fig. 2. Did you have problems with logging in?**

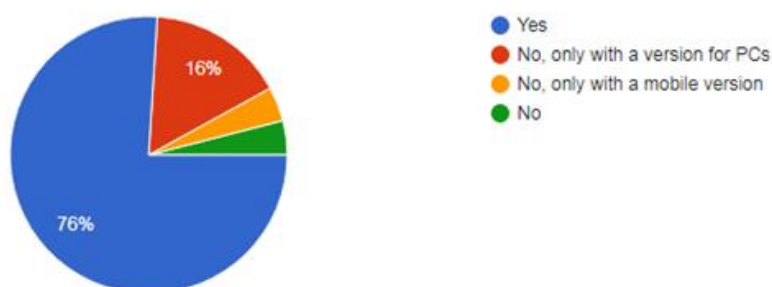
5 ответов



**Fig. 3. Question for whose, who had challenges with login while re-entering the system: did you have to type your user name instead of your email address to re-enter the profile**

The next question describes the attitude of learners to the interface of Canvas, specifically that almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all users found the design of the system and the distribution of its units convenient for them, which can be explained by interface simplicity and plainness. 16 % of respondents preferred to work with the PC version, which is considered to be more suitable for usage, though the mobile version of Canvas Free for Student allows its users to perform the same functions only with lower digital resolution and speed (thus, 4% enjoyed the mobile application interface more) (Fig.4).

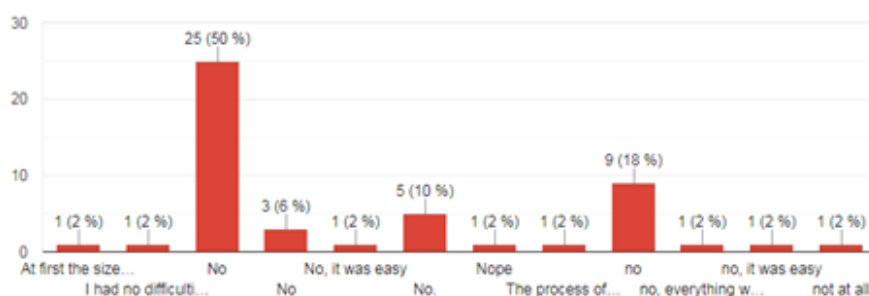
50 ответов



**Fig. 4. Were you satisfied with the platform interface in both visions?**

As for possible complications with personal information section arrangement, all survey participants enjoyed the simplicity of this process one way or another, except for one respondent, who had had to change the size of a profile photo to upload it successfully (Fig.5.).

50 ответов

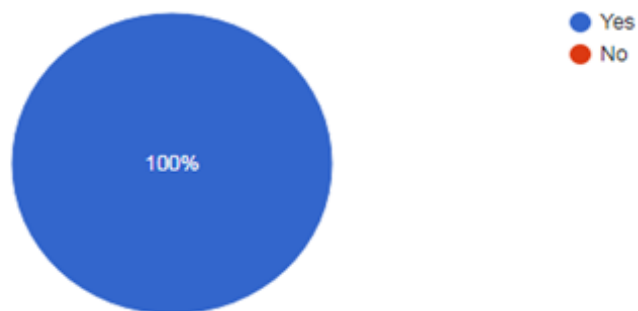


**Fig. 5. Was it difficult to add personal information into your profile?**

The effective functionality of the particular version of Canvas LMS is proved through the results of two next questions: when a learner gets a code to a course with a limited number of participants, he or she can successfully enroll in it to participate in discussions, do exercises and / or take tests (Fig.6).

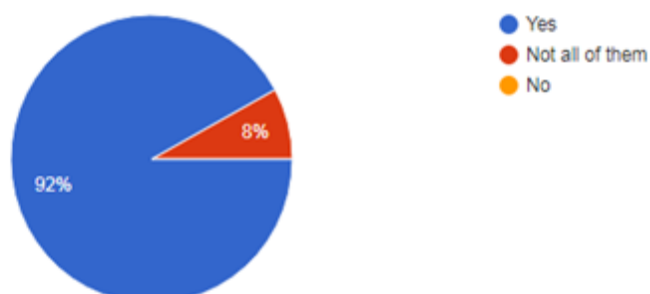
Figure 7 depicts the percentage of users, who managed to fulfill all tasks, which leads to a conclusion that only 8% of responders had to deal with complications with some activities either because of failure to follow the instructions of the course leader or due to technical errors.

50 ответов



**Fig. 6. Did you manage to enroll in the course(s) you aimed at?**

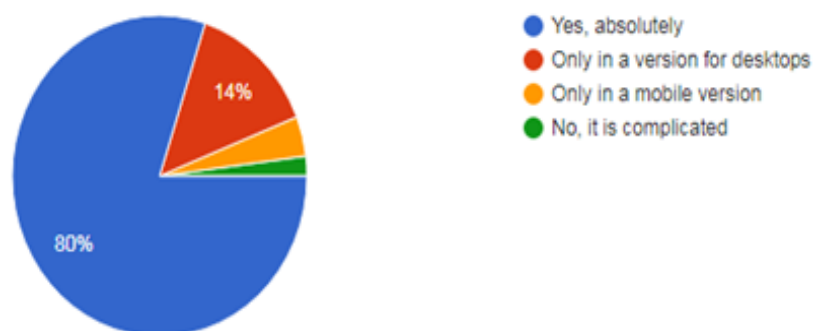
50 ответов



**Fig. 7. Was it possible for you to do tasks, upload files, take tests?**

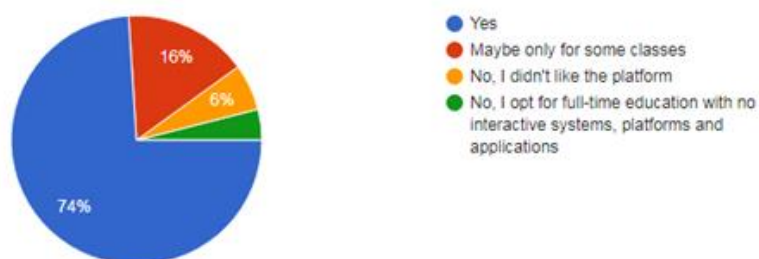
Since the educational process has recently been modernized and interactive platforms and applications occupy a leading position as an alternative to traditional ways, we asked the respondents the following questions (Fig. 8).

50 ответов



**Fig. 8. Was the format of studying convenient for you?**

50 ответов

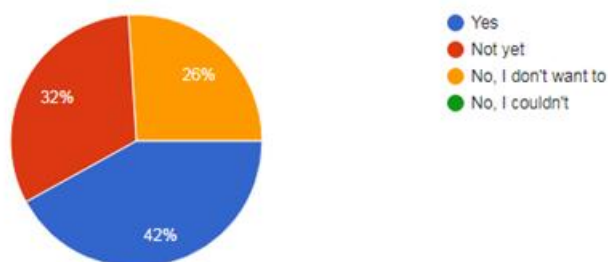


**Fig. 9. Would you like to use Canvas as one of the main platforms for studying?**

In accordance with the received answers, it gets clear that when updated, such interactive platforms as Canvas, especially its version for PCs, can be implemented into the full-time, individual or forced distance studying format, at least partially (Fig. 9).

To summarize the survey and to make students interested in joining the courses with free access in a number of disciplines available on the platform, we asked them to share whether they had used such an opportunity and, if not, explain why.

50 ответов



**Fig. 10. Did you enroll in any public courses with open access?**

As a result, it turned out that the number of those learners, who have enrolled in additional available courses (42%), was just a little smaller than those who have not (58%). However, 16 of the latter still planned to try attending new courses with available access not wanting to miss such a chance to learn more and their outlook (Fig. 10).

Thus, we can conclude about the usefulness of the Canvas platform for students based on their experience and our own practice of using this platform for teaching pedagogical disciplines. It is important to note that students are open to using different digital tools in their learning process, and this opens up a “window” of opportunity for all interested parties. The Canvas platform can act as an effective alternative for students in case of impossibility or problems with access to the main educational platform (at V.N.Karazin Kharkiv National University, this is Moodle). In the conditions of forced distance learning and congestion of the main platform, Canvas is an interesting tool with a familiar interface and wide opportunities for learning, especially foreign languages.

**Discussion.** An important factor in the successful application of any learning platform is the development of digital competence of all participants in the educational process. The desire to apply digital technologies in teaching alone is not enough, so before introducing digital tools for teaching students, you need to make sure that you, as a teacher, will be successful in this field (Zhernovnykova et al., 2020). To do this, it is necessary to study the capabilities of a digital tool and compare them with your own digital skills and capabilities of a technical nature (Internet speed, comparability of a software product, availability of up-to-date technology).

Another important factor that makes LMS Canvas an effective learning tool for forced distance learning is its compatibility with mobile devices. Given the uncertainty of the educational process, a mobile gadget is often the most important means of teaching students, especially foreign languages (Bardus et al. 2021). In this context, students and teachers who use LMS Canvas get a lot of variability in their actions and capabilities.

LMS Canvas can also be used in teacher training. For example, as a means of collecting and analyzing information. Educators can become more familiar with levels of access to academic and instructional analytics, become more familiar with the analytics capabilities of LMS, and be more aware of the

implications of learning analytics for finding the right content (Duin & Tham, 2020).

**Conclusion.** In general, the platform of online courses Canvas is qualitatively designed to provide high-quality education for students from all around the world, though several drawbacks may still be present at this stage of program existence. They mostly concentrate on complaints of some users about the difficulty of logging in and downloading files within the mobile application, as well as the lack of Ukrainian language among the offered ones, the required access to the Internet and rare glitches in time zone settings that can be considered as temporary inconveniences as the program developers regularly make updates in the platform, which significantly improves the quality of the product and increases the range of its distribution in the market.

However, at the same time, the number of positive features of the system significantly exceeds negative ones. Simple registration, clear location of the main working sections, concise design, and, most importantly, the ability to work with video, audio and text documents of various formats, following your own results in the form of assessments, joining various open courses and becoming a part of the learning process with limited access (Canvas Student, 2021) make Canvas LMS convenient for use both during standard full-time learning as an additional platform and in the form of the main educational environment for institutions whose educational program is based on a combination of classical and alternative methods, as well as for individual training, in the case of forced distance learning and even for independent self-development and outlook enlargement.

**Perspectives of Further Research.** In the future, we plan to continue researching such online course platforms to identify the most convenient and useful ones for usage for educational purposes, increase digital awareness among learners and, as a result, improve the educational system on the basis of digitalization.

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## **НАВЧАЛЬНА ПЛАТФОРМА CANVAS: МОЖЛИВОСТІ ТА ОСОБЛИВОСТІ**

*Останнім часом освітня сфера зазнає поступових змін у підходах до неї та ставленні всіх її учасників до процесу навчання. Швидка цифровізація разом із глобальними життєвими викликами, такими як пандемія Covid-19, дозволяє використовувати технології разом із традиційними засобами освіти, щоб задовольнити потреби сучасних учнів не лише безболісно, але й сприятливо. У статті розглядається необхідність модернізації традиційного навчального процесу та оптимізації його для тих, хто займається за індивідуальним планом або у форматі вимушеного дистанційного навчання, також спричиненим пандемією. Реалізація сучасних змін може бути здійснена за допомогою спеціалізованих додатків та веб-систем, зокрема платформи онлайн-курсів «Канвас» (Canvas), яка знаходиться в центрі уваги нашої статті. Також у роботі коротко*

згадуються попередні дослідження колег, які працювали зі схожими платформами та / або власне із «Канвас». У статті також розкрито технічні можливості та особливості системи «Канвас», представлено дослідження її відповідності сучасним потребам студентів шляхом аналізу її переваг та недоліків, а також описано її плюси та мінуси не лише з точки зору студентів, які вважаються представниками основної категорії користувачів платформи, але також враховуючи досвід викладачів та їхні враження від платформи як основної чи допоміжної освітньої системи онлайн-курсів. Читачі цієї статті також можуть ознайомитися з основними елементами структури платформи «Канвас», дізнатися про їхні характеристики та вирішити, чи схвалювати чи таку альтернативу застарілому відвідуванню курсів. Крім того, дослідження включає опитування, проведене серед 50 студентів, які вже використовували платформу відповідно до вимог навчальної програми, тож поділитися враженнями, починаючи з приєднання до системи та завершуючи загальним огляду цього осередку онлайн-курсів. Підсумовуючи, ми надаємо читачам статті загальний висновок про платформу, її відповідність вимогам освітньої системи, зокрема потребам учнів.

**Ключові слова:** Canvas; навчання; онлайн-курси; освіта; цифрові технології.

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