

# THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN DISTANCE LEARNING

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## Abstract

In the 21st century, society needs a new system of education that must be continuous and proceed throughout the whole active human life. Bulgarian higher education has undergone a number of transformations, and it is actively working on modernization. Those changes require restructuring of all areas of activity: educational, research, administrative, etc.

Modern technologies, as well as the Internet, are dramatically changing the style of education, training/learning and teaching, as they enable people to have remote access and receive and use information much faster and more conveniently.

During the last decades, more and more Bulgarian universities have been introducing distance learning, which is an opportunity to change the way the learning process proceeds. Distance learning opens up new opportunities to extend participation in lifelong learning, to personalize the learning process and to create prerequisites for enriching the learning experience and quality of learning. The freedom it provides from the perspective of the ability to learn from anywhere in the world, at a convenient time, in a learner-friendly environment, contributes to increasing the scope of learning.

With regard to the implementation of distance learning, the university library must not only maintain the quality and scope of its traditional functions and activities, but also offer to students and faculty a range of new services and high-quality information support. In order to ensure the effectiveness of distance learning, it is necessary to work for continuous, free and independent access to the necessary resources in forms that are as comfortable as possible for use.

As a key elements of the university structure, academic libraries must meet the new requirements for providing information, organizing the services offered to all participants in the educational process, etc. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Bulgarian universities offering distance learning and to analyze the role of academic libraries.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Distance Learning, Bulgaria, Education, Globalization.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The invention of the internet and the development of contemporary information and communication technologies (ICT) have drastically changed the world. Mobile technologies and devices are ubiquitous and offer access to information and communication opportunities regardless of time and location. The power, functionality and accessibility of mobile devices increase on a daily basis, thus providing more and more opportunities [1]. Change is the key element for the twenty first century that poses many challenges and enormous pressure on our daily life, work and society. Political, economical, social, and technological environments are changing significantly and rapidly. Information and communication technologies (ICT) transform all aspects of education and distance education which is a rapidly growing segment within higher education is affected greatly [2].

Distance learning is a modern educational technology whereby the learning process is flexible – without obligatory and continuous attendance at seminars and lectures. It is a kind of training where the students are in a different place from the teacher, communicating with each other through a computer or other means of communication. This form allows flexible time distribution with a high degree of independence from the teacher. Distance learning provides a unique opportunity to acquire high quality education without attending a training institution.

Distance education has been moving very fast from correspondence education to online education or web based delivery of education. The Internet and World Wide Web broaden the scope of conventional distance education to any where, any time and any pace. New types of educational technologies are emerging at an ever-accelerating pace. The integration of new types of educational technologies allows flexible learning, increased potential for interaction and access to a wide clientele and the global market. The growth of distance education worldwide is remarkable as technological

development, globalization, and massification bring changes to the educational environment that alter the traditional educational system and structure [2].

Distance learning is a process that uses different forms of information and communication technologies, causing the need for new active student behavior. Today, distance learning technology is not a novelty, but an established form, an alternative to or a real future for modern higher education.

In the 21st century, society needs a new system of education that must be continuous and proceed throughout the whole active human life. Bulgarian higher education has undergone a number of transformations, and it is actively working on modernization. Those changes require restructuring of all areas of activity: educational, research, administrative, etc.

Distance learning has a prospect for the future since it provides many advantages: student mobility; opportunity for personal training pace; training at a time, convenient for the student; work- based learning; significant decrease in costs; continuing training tailored to meet the requirements of disadvantaged students, etc. This form of training is very suitable especially for those who work and are restricted in their ability for a prolonged absence from work as well as for people with special educational needs or disadvantaged people. In this regard, distance learning has increased widely and a number of universities have established distance learning centres with the aim of organizing this type of activity [3]. During the last decades, more and more Bulgarian universities have been introducing distance learning, which is an opportunity to change the way the learning process proceeds. Distance learning opens up new opportunities to extend participation in lifelong learning, to personalize the learning process and to create prerequisites for enriching the learning experience and quality of learning. The freedom it provides from the perspective of the ability to learn from anywhere in the world, at a convenient time, in a learner-friendly environment, contributes to increasing the scope of learning.

The extensive insertion of mobile technologies in everyday life reveals new ways of their effective application in education, science, access to information and, in particular, library activities. It is inadmissible for a contemporary library not to use actively the new communication technologies, not to offer online and mobile access to its services and resources. In order to answer adequately contemporary users' needs, information institutions must provide easy and convenient access to their resources as well as services. Libraries should be an inseparable part of the contemporary world, where technologies become more accessible and communication – more easily realized [1].

## **2 STATE AND PRIVATE ACCREDITED UNIVERSITIES IN BULGARIA OFFERING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES**

According to The Register of Higher Education Institutions (<http://rvu.mon.bg/>), which is kept by virtue of Article 10, Paragraph. 2, Item 3 of the Higher Education Act and includes information about all higher education institutions having an accreditation in the Republic of Bulgaria by the beginning of April 2020, there are 53 higher education institutions out of which:

**39 state higher education institutions** – Agricultural University - Plovdiv; Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv; Academy of the Ministry of Interior - Sofia; St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo; Georgi Benkovski Higher National Air Force School - Dolna Metropolya; N.Y.Vaptsarov Naval Academy - Varna; Higher School of Civil Engineering (VSU) "Lyuben Karavelov" - Sofia; Todor Kableshkov University of Transport - Sofia; Higher School of Telecommunications and Post - Sofia; Rakovski Defence and Staff College - Sofia; University of Economics - Varna; Institute of Plant Protection at the National Plant Protection Service; University of Forestry - Sofia; Medical University - Pleven; Medical University - Plovdiv; Medical University -Sofia; Varna University of Medicine Prof. Dr Paraskev Stoyanov; University of Mining and Geology "St. Ivan Rilski" - Sofia; Vasil Levski National Military University - Veliko Tarnovo; National Academy for Theater and Film Arts "Krastyo Sarafov" - Sofia; National Academy of Music "Professor Pantcho Vladigerov" - Sofia; National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" - Sofia; National Academy of Arts - Sofia; Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"; University of Rousse "Angel Kanchev"; Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"; D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov; Technical University - Varna; Technical University - Gabrovo; Technical University - Sofia; Trakia University - Stara Zagora; Burgas Prof. Assen Zlatarov University; University of National and World Economy - Sofia; University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy - Sofia; University of Library Studies and Information Technologies - Sofia; University of Food Technologies - Plovdiv; University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy - Sofia; Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen; South-West University "Neofit Rilski" - Blagoevgrad.

**14 private universities** – American University in Bulgaria - Blagoevgrad; Burgas Free University; Varna Free University "Chernorizec Hrabar"; University of Agribusiness and Rural Development - Plovdiv; Higher School of Insurance and Finance - Sofia; Higher School of Management; Higher School of Security and Economy - Plovdiv; European Polytechnical University - Pernik; European Higher School of Economics and Management - Plovdiv; College of Management, Commerce and Marketing - Sofia; College of Tourism - Blagoevgrad; International Business School - Botevgrad; New Bulgarian University - Sofia; College of Theatre "Lyuben Grois" - Sofia.

*According to the information provided in the Register, the state universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes are the following:*

- 1 University of Economics – Varna – six specialties: Accounting and Auditing; Finance; Economics and Trade; Industrial Business and Entrepreneurship; Real Estate and Investment; Tourism;
- 2 D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov - eleven specialties: Accounting and Control; Insurance and Social Affairs; Finance; Marketing; International Economic Relations; Project Management; Agricultural Economics; Economy of Tourism; Economy of Trade; Industrial Business and Entrepreneurship;
- 3 University of National and World Economy - Sofia – ten specialties: Economics, Society and Human Resources sub-field; Finance, Accounting and Control sub-field; Accounting and Control; Economics and Infrastructure sub-field; Business Administration; Administration and Management field; Public Administration; Regional Development; Marketing;
- 4 Regional Center for Distance Learning - Haskovo, a branch of the University of National and World Economy - Sofia – six specialties: Economics; Economics, Society and Human Resources sub-division; Finance, Accounting and Control Sub-division; Accounting and Control; Business Administration; Administration and Management field;
- 5 University of Library Studies and Information Technologies – Sofia - one specialty: National Security;
- 6 Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen – one specialty: Tourism.

*According to the information provided in the Register, the state universities having distance learning master's programmes are the following:*

- 1 St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo – twenty-four specialties: Theology of Personality and Society; Cultural and Historical Heritage / Cultural Tourism /; Cultural and Historical Heritage in Bulgaria and Russia; Ethnology; Cultural Tourism; Management of Education; Information and Communication Technologies in Primary School; Information and Communication Technologies in Education; Literacy of Children and Adults from Minority Ethnic Communities; Pedagogy of Children with Special Educational Needs; Social Pedagogy; Social Work with Children at Risk; Social Pedagogical Prevention and Probation Activities; Modern Educational Technologies; Pedagogy of Technology Training and Entrepreneurship; Business Administration; Public Administration; Marketing; International Economic Relations. International economy; Accounting and Control; Finance; Finance. Banking; Financial and Accounting Management; Information Technology in the Judiciary and Executive Authority;
- 2 Rakovski Defence and Staff College - Sofia – two specialties: National Security and Defense; Logistics of Security and Defense;
- 3 University of Economics – Varna – five specialties: Bank Management; Finance and Innovation; Business Consultancy; Corporate Business and Management; Logistics Management;
- 4 University of Forestry - Sofia – one area of study: Business Administration;
- 5 Medical University - Pleven – one area of study: Public Health and Health Management;
- 6 Vasil Levski National Military University - Veliko Tarnovo – two specialties: National and Regional Security - Protection of Classified Information; National and Regional Security - Crisis Management;
- 7 National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" - Sofia – three specialties: Youth Activities and Sport; Sport, Fitness, Health; Sports Management;

- 8 University of Rousse "Angel Kanchev" – five specialties: Vehicle Management and Service; Automotive Technology; Car Diagnostics, Maintenance and Repair; Technology and Transport Management; Hybrid and Electric Vehicles;
- 9 Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – two specialties: Political Pathologies of the Global World (in English); ICT in Education;
- 10 D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov – seventy specialties: Currency, Customs and Tax Controls (after non-economic disciplines); Currency, Customs and Tax Controls (after a professional bachelor's degree); Statistical Business Consultancy; Bank Accounting and Auditing; Bank Accounting and Auditing (after non-economic disciplines); Accounting and Auditing in Non-financial Corporations; Accounting and Auditing in Non-financial Corporations (after non-economic disciplines); Accounting and Auditing in Non-financial Corporations (after a professional bachelor's degree); Public Sector Accounting and Auditing; Public Sector Accounting and Auditing (after non-economic disciplines); Financial Analysis and Control; Financial Control and External Audit; Financial Control and External Audit (after non-economic disciplines); Financial Control and External Audit (after a professional bachelor's degree); Bank Management; Bank Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); Insurance; Insurance (after non-economic disciplines); Healthcare Management; Health Management (after non-economic disciplines); Investment Management; Investment Management (after non-economic disciplines); Social Management; Social Management (after non-economic disciplines); Social Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); Financial Management; Financial Management (after non-economic disciplines); Financial Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); Public Sector Financial Management; Public Sector Financial Management (after non-economic disciplines); Public Sector Financial Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); Business Administration; Business Administration (after non-economic disciplines); Business Administration (after a professional bachelor's degree); Management of Business Organizations (after a professional bachelor's degree); Educational Management; Educational Management (after non-economic disciplines); Public Administration; Public Administration (after non-economic disciplines); Public Administration (after a professional bachelor's degree); Human Resource Management; Human Resources Management (after non-economic disciplines); Human Resources Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); Corporate Management and Controlling; Corporate Management and Controlling (after non-economic disciplines); Business Planning; E-business and Digital Markets; Business Information Systems and Technologies; Business Information Systems and Technologies (after non-economic disciplines); Business Information Technology (after non-economic disciplines); Marketing; Marketing Communications; International Business and Management; International Business and Management (after non-economic disciplines); International Business and Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); International Tourism; Management of International Projects; Project Management; Project Management (after non-economic disciplines); Agribusiness; Agribusiness (after non-economic disciplines); Tourism Economics and Management; Economics and Management of Tourism (after non-economic disciplines); Corporate Management; Corporate Management (after non-economic disciplines); Business Management; Business Management (after non-economic disciplines); Business Management (after a professional bachelor's degree); Commercial Mediation and Investment Banking;
- 11 Technical university - Gabrovo – one specialty: Business Administration;
- 12 University of National and World Economy - Sofia – fifteen specialties: Human Resources Economics with Specialization in Human Resources Management; Accounting and Control; Financial Management; Tourism Management; Management of Retail Chains; International Management; Management of International Projects; Business Administration; Business Administration with Specialization in Senior Management; Public Administration with Specialization in Public Administration; Public Administration with Specialization in Health Management; Development of Smart Cities; Regional Business and Management; Marketing; Marketing with a Degree in Advertising Management;
- 13 Regional Center for Distance Learning - Haskovo – four specialties: Human Resources Economics with Specialization in Human Resources Management; Accounting and Control; Business Administration; Business Administration with Specialization in Social Responsibility;

- 14 University of Library Studies and Information Technologies - Sofia – three specialties: Library Information and Cultural Management; Media Information and Advertising; Information Systems and Technologies;
- 15 South-West University "Neofit Rilski" - Blagoevgrad – one specialty: Educational Management.

*According to the information provided in the Register, the private universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes are the following:*

- 1 Varna Free University "Chernorizec Hrabar" – four specialties: Business Administration and Management; Public Administration and Management; International Economic Relations; Finance and Auditing;
- 2 University of Agribusiness and Rural Development – Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo branch – five specialties: Business Administration; Agricultural Economics; Economy of Tourism; Finance; Finance in Russian;
- 3 Higher School of Insurance and Finance - Sofia – twelve specialties: Insurance, Ensurance and Finance; IT Analysis and Business Strategies; Business Economics, Entrepreneurship and Innovation; Business Management and Marketing; Business Psychology and Human Resources; Marketing, Sales and E-business; International Business and Finance; Finance; Financial Management and Marketing; Financial Management and Marketing in English; Accounting and Control; Accounting, Control and Finance;
- 4 International Business School - Botevgrad – four specialties: Business Administration; Marketing; International Business; Tourism;
- 5 New Bulgarian University - Sofia – fifteen specialties: Business Management and Entrepreneurship; Marketing; Accounting and Controlling; Finance; Tourism Management; Ecology and Environmental Protection; Business Administration; Business Management and Entrepreneurship; Marketing; Accounting and Controlling; Accounting and Auditing; Finance; Tourism; Tourism Management; Ecology and Environmental Protection.

*According to the information provided in the Register, the private universities having distance learning master's programmes are the following:*

- 1 Burgas Free University – eight specialties: Business Administration; Marketing; Marketing and Management of the Tourism Business; International Economic Relations; Accounting and Control; Finance; Business IT; Public Communication and Social Psychology;
- 2 Varna Free University "Chernorizec Hrabar" – four specialties: Administration Infrastructure; Management and International Marketing; Management of International Business Projects; Finance;
- 3 University of Agribusiness and Rural Development – Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo branch – two specialties: Business Administration; Finance and Banking;
- 4 Higher School of Insurance and Finance - Sofia – fifteen specialties: Insurance Business and Risk Management; Insurance Case; Pension and Health Insurance; Banking; Digital Marketing and Business Finance; Corporate Social Responsibility (Financial Management); Sales, Business Finance and Communications; Human Resource Management and Leadership Behavior; Finance; Financial Management and Marketing; Digital Marketing and Online Analysis; Corporate Control and Economic Analysis; Accounting and Control; Accounting and Management Analysis; Accounting, Control and Corporate Analysis;
- 5 International Business School - Botevgrad – six specialties: Business Administration; Entrepreneurship and Innovation; Project Management; Business Finance; Event Management; Tourism Management;
- 6 New Bulgarian University - Sofia – eleven specialties: Business Administration; Business Communications; Organizational Excellence Management; Human Resources Management and Development; Human Resources Management and Development (in English); Bank Management; Marketing Management; International Alternative Tourism; Tourism Business Management; Tourism Management; Environmental Expertise and Control.

*According to the information provided in the Register, the state universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes are five (Fig. 1):*

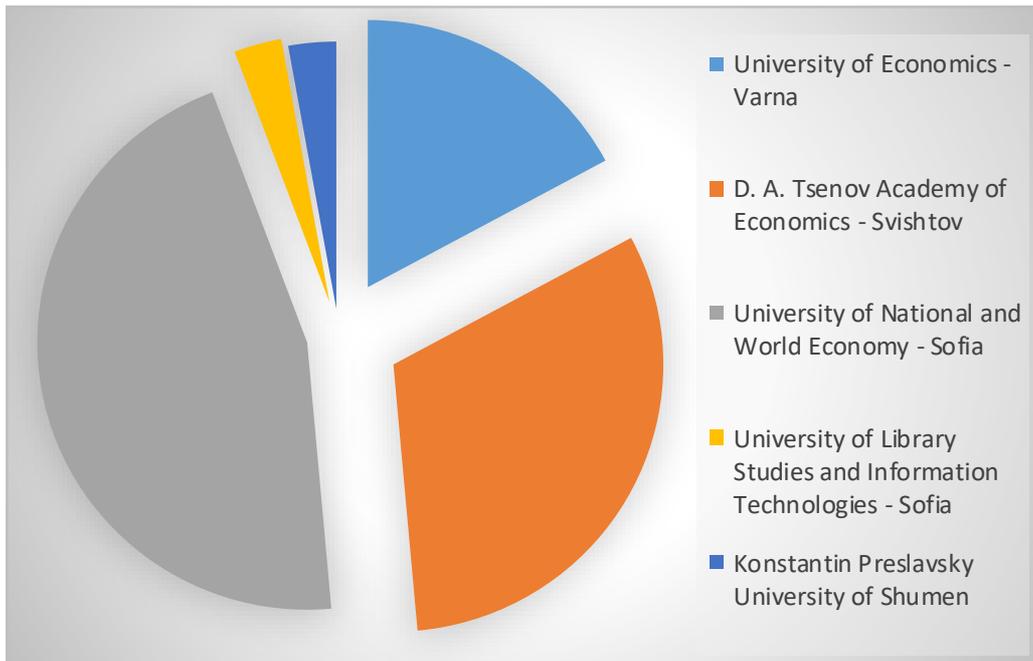


Figure 1. The state universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes.

The prevailing specialties are economically oriented and overlap, as Tourism and National Security are specific in these settings.

According to the information provided in the Register, the state universities having distance learning master's programmes are fourteen (Fig. 2):

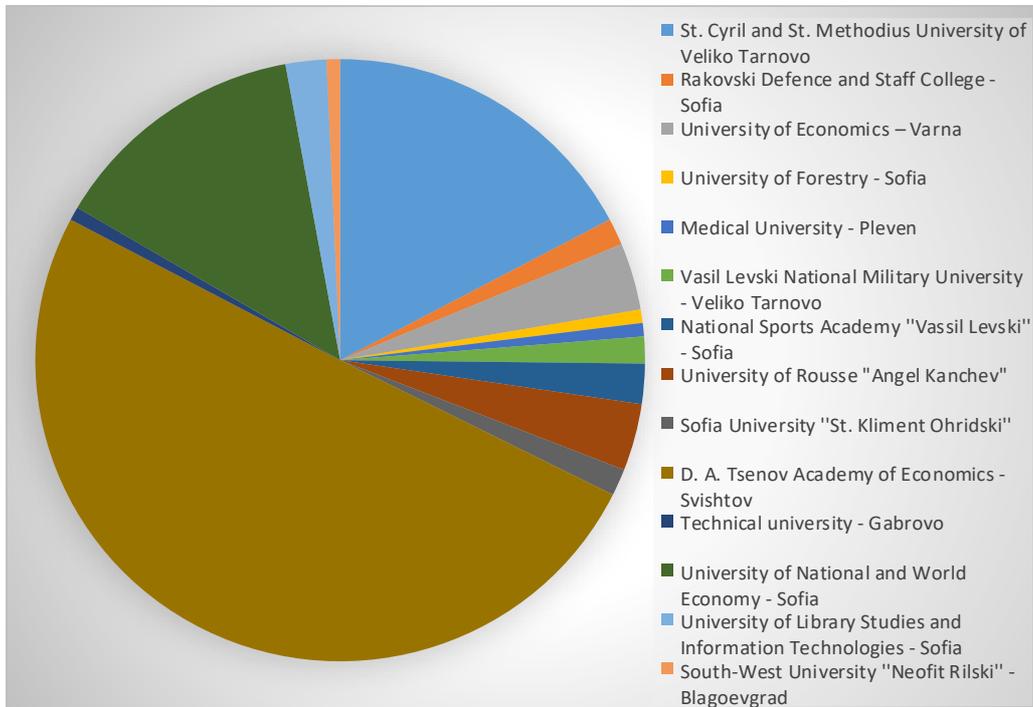


Figure 2. The state universities having distance learning master's programmes.

Here, the Academy of Economics "Dimitar Tsenov" - Svishtov has a leading role, which offers 50% of the master's programs of the state universities in Bulgaria. Unlike bachelor's specialties, a large selection of specialties is offered in all professional fields, which covers educational pursuits in Bulgaria.

According to the information provided in the Register, the private universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes are five (Fig. 3):

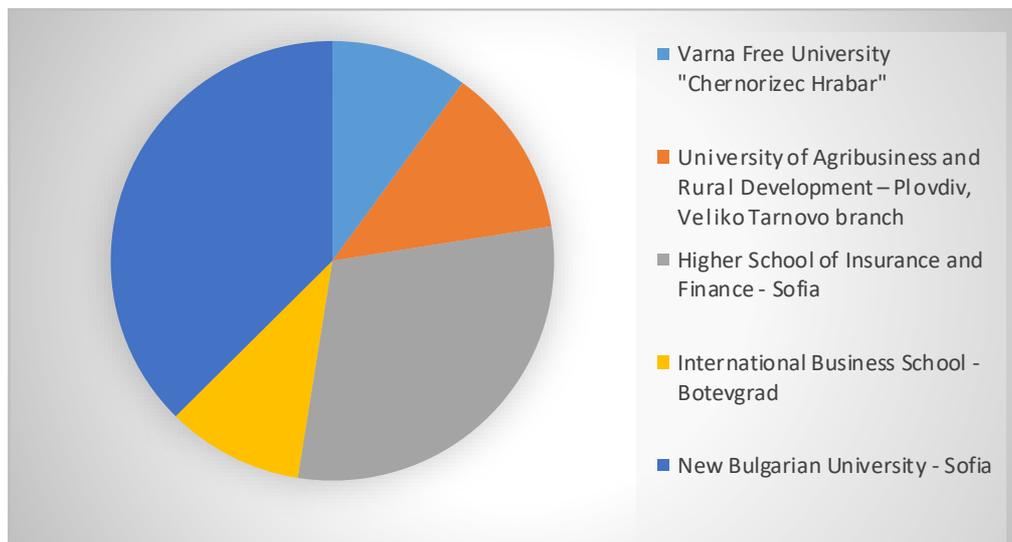


Figure 3. The state universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes.

Here, again the economic specialties prevail and the specialties of Ecology and Tourism stand out.

According to the information provided in the Register, the private universities having distance learning master's programmes are six (Fig. 4):

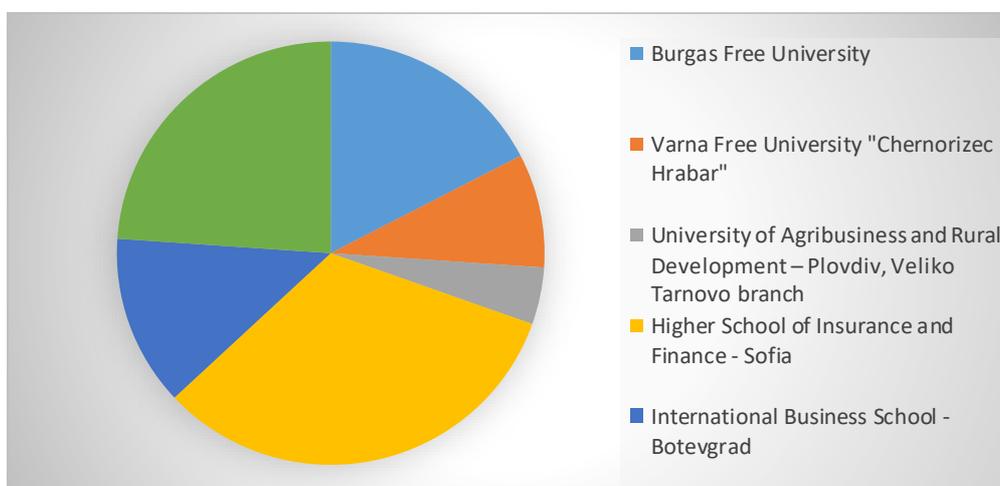


Figure 4. The state universities having distance learning bachelor's programmes.

### 3 THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN DISTANCE LEARNING

The formulation of basic communication channels for information dissemination is traditionally formed in university libraries and requires the definition of basic areas of interaction between educational models and university library models, which requires reviewing the dynamic of changes in the specific working conditions. Relevantly, the new functions of the university library, connecting with the E-learning are considered to be in the so-called condition of 'dynamical balance'. Thus, they can provide dynamical educational content, adaptive enough to meet the changing requirements, and corresponding to the new criteria [4].

Identifying the conditions, defining the perspectives and the sustainable models for dynamical interaction between university libraries and educational models is a key to development and

implementation of long-term strategies and concepts and provides appropriate conditions for strategic plans execution [5].

The integration of the educational and training content in the intelligent platforms, based on mobile communications, is a precondition for engaging the university library as a basic support center for knowledge saving [4].

All students, faculty members, administrators, staff members, or any other members of an institution of higher education are entitled to the library services and resources of that institution, including direct communication with the appropriate library personnel, regardless of where they are physically located in relation to the campus; where they attend class in relation to the institution's main campus; or the modality by which they take courses. Academic libraries must, therefore, meet the information and research needs of all these constituents, wherever they may be. This principle of access entitlement, as applied to individuals at a distance, is the undergirding and uncompromising conviction of the Standards for Distance Learning Library Services, have been prepared by the Standards Committee, formerly the Guidelines Committee, of the Distance Learning Section (DLS) of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA) [6].

With regard to the implementation of distance learning, the university library must not only maintain the quality and scope of its traditional functions and activities, but also offer to students and faculty a range of new services and high-quality information support. In order to ensure the effectiveness of distance learning, it is necessary to work for continuous, free and independent access to the necessary resources in forms that are as comfortable as possible for use.

As a key elements of the university structure, academic libraries must meet the new requirements for providing information, organizing the services offered to all participants in the educational process, etc. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Bulgarian universities offering distance learning and to analyze the role of academic libraries.

Faculty and librarians are all at the crossroads and being pressured to increase their productivity and to change instructional strategies to accommodate changes and educational reforms. There is a need for the new vision and the new roles of librarians within the changing distance education environment [2].

Nowadays, the study of distance learning at universities cannot be fully explored without the role of the academic library. Distance learning is not an isolated process but a form of communication, not only between a student and a teacher, but also an interaction of students, teachers and the library in a single learning process, a part of a communication chain.

The experience of the reviewed university libraries in distance learning has been analyzed and summarized on the basis of the activities of their academic libraries. These are the mandatory structures present in every modern university, motive force and a center of the training (The data presented in the report are based on information available on the websites of the universities in question).

The presented university libraries are from all over the country - this is the most appropriate way to give a picture of the Bulgarian experience and their role in distance learning. Here, we will present only a part of the services related to distance learning in some of the libraries of accredited state and private colleges offering distance learning.

Burgas Free University has a virtual library that has complementary functions to the main platform and is a system providing a platform for long-term storage of books, articles, textbooks in the form of electronic text-based documents. Students and course attendees enrolled in distance learning programmes are provided with Internet access to e-learning resources such as textbooks, teaching aids and handbooks; video lectures pre-filmed in the classroom; articles, dictionaries, reference books, presentations, etc.

University of Agribusiness and Rural Development - Plovdiv provides students with the opportunity to use a virtual library (<http://repository.e-uard.bg/>), where upon registration they can find electronic resources, books and multimedia textbooks included in the education in various specialties in the higher education institution. A "Guide to Working with the E-Learning Platform" which has the category working with "E-Repository/Virtual Library" is also provided.

The library of Higher School of Insurance and Finance - Sofia has on its website a section called "Online library" that provides a variety of study-relevant materials, organized into thematic headings: Accounting, Control, Finance, Banking, Insurance, Assurance, Management, Business, Innovation, and Journalism.

The library of Rakovski Defence and Staff College - Sofia has electronic resources which are available and represented in the following Product Categories: Military Magazine, Military Academy Yearbook, E-Books, Books, Monographs, Textbooks, Conferences, Our Authors in Other Publishing houses, and Scanned Books at the Academic Library.

The library of the University of Economics - Varna offers an online catalog of the Free Access Fund from the University's website. Through it, students, lecturers and citizens have access to information on available titles since 1983, as well as access to full texts of more than 5 500 books, articles and reports. A great benefit and convenience for students is that a large number of metadata has a link to the full text of the publication - digitized and provided in PDF format.

In New Bulgarian University Library Statistics for 2019 physical visits are 199 088 and virtual ones are 127 820. The library documents borrowed are 125 778, and electronic units used are 557 621. These indicators suggest a huge potential for library users. The digital library of New Bulgarian University offers the following collections for registered users: Most read titles; Course literature; Electronic collection for the visually impaired people; Cultural Heritage; Vera Mutafchieva; Rare and valuable titles. The New Bulgarian University Library is the only one that provides a supportive environment, special facilities, appropriate teaching materials, and a wide variety of information resources and services for students with special educational needs, as well as assistive technologies that support self-study.

The development of the library of University of Plovdiv into a dynamic information environment occurs mainly through various projects that provide access to e-resources and digital learning content to support the educational process. A digitalization studio has been created, equipped with an e-scan Agata book scanner, a graphics station and a storage server. The automated library software currently in use has been upgraded with new functionalities for visualization and exchange of digitized documents.

The Library of the University of Rousse offers online access to scientific information resources, provided through: 5 information-searching systems in Bulgarian and foreign languages, providing access to full-text databases with over 15 000 titles of scientific and specialized periodicals; 10 reference information search systems in Bulgarian and foreign languages, providing access to over 30 million documents; 4 open-access information search systems, of which about 30% are full-text; textbooks and teaching aids on CDs, DVDs and online access to electronic editions of periodicals.

DLiB – the virtual library of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov contains collections of successfully defended dissertations and habilitation works in the post-1990 period in 13 accredited scientific specialties, monographs from the Education and Science library and the Economic World library, studies from the inter-university magazine Economics 21, Annual of the Academy of Economics, Almanac of Scientific Research and Annual Almanac of Scientific Research of Doctoral Students, articles from the Business Management Journal, inter-university magazine Economics 21 and National Economic Archive, reports from conferences of the Academy of Economics.

The library of the University of National and World Economy - Sofia has the status of a "depository library" of the World Intellectual Property Organization. There is a digital library that provides free access to the electronic content of editions of the oldest fund of the library, dated from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; new books and textbooks provided by their authors to assist the learning process.

One of the important activities of libraries, which are essential for distance and other forms of training, is the offered training sessions for the development of information competence. The sessions are open to students, doctoral students and lecturers.

One of the disadvantages of academic libraries offering distance learning in Bulgaria is working hours. Only 52% of them work during the weekends.

New Bulgarian University is the only one whose library operates on weekends. This is also crucial for distance learning students who are required to work with library documents that are not offered remotely.

57% of the university libraries surveyed do not have separate websites, but all of them have online catalogs available online. The lack of standalone websites sometimes limits the availability of the services offered. Many of the university's websites or the library itself have a "Useful Links" section, which contains links to scientific and specialized libraries, full-text documents – dictionaries, encyclopedias, e-books, electronic journals and newspapers, Internet search engines for scientific

information, library catalogs and specialized portals, websites for legal free download and reading of e-books, digital collections, educational web platforms, etc. There are valuable reference sources in all fields of knowledge for researchers, teachers and students.

In support of distance learning and other forms of student learning, libraries offer access to abstract and full-text databases of scholarly publications. Access to the information on the platforms is carried out on the principle of IP registration, which enables all users connected to the academic institutions' Internet networks to use them.

#### **4 CONCLUSIONS**

A number of contemporaneous authors were making note of the extent to which academic libraries were transforming themselves into study environments, learning spaces, collaboration spaces, and so forth, in which open shelves were being replaced by a variety of other student-oriented library services. Libraries have a central role in education, learning, and vocational training in support of increasing knowledge. The rapid evolution of information and communication technology in the learning field imposes, supports and stimulates the re-engineering of the library. The Academic Library should be a universal library whose main purpose is library and information services for readers and support for research, teaching and publishing activities in the preparation of highly qualified personnel.

Academic libraries must constantly seek opportunities to fully support all forms of trainees, as they are an essential part of the university space and have an indispensable role in distance learning. It is necessary for the library to become an active and productive participant in the process of building a university information system for training management.

The libraries of all accredited public and private higher education institutions offering distance learning are working towards maximum coverage of the needs of students, using all the opportunities offered by the modern information environment.

Despite the uneven development in terms of the use of e-resources in the different universities in Bulgaria, there is a continuous enrichment of the information environment with the provision of databases, digital collections, and educational platforms from the academic libraries.

The dynamics of modernity and to some extent its unpredictability accelerate the progress in the electronic existence of universities, which is already an integral part of their essence and appearance.

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