PECULIARITIES OF DISTANCE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Summary

The article defines distance learning as an appropriate way to reform education and increase learning effectiveness and introduce advanced educational systems. It is emphasized that distance learning is a new organization of education based on the use of both the best traditional methods of acquiring knowledge and new information and telecommunication technologies that have been adopted in education through online learning environments «platforms». It was emphasized that Skype and ZOOM are the most common platforms for conducting classes that are used today in Ukrainian educational institutions. The advantages and disadvantages of using distance learning in the process of learning foreign languages are highlighted. Among the main advantages, we named the following: a great chance to learn from home, pursue his choice of education at any time of his life, flexibility in a distance learning program, and others. The main disadvantages are as follows: the physical aspect of learning, students have to master a lot of theoretical materials on their own, lack of live communication, cheating, etc. The role of the teacher and students of higher education in the educational process is defined.

Key words: distance education, educational learning platforms, foreign language, advantages of distance learning, disadvantages of distance learning.

1. Introduction

A significant number of recommendations and conclusions (which were taken from scientific articles, monographs, manuals, and dissertations on pedagogical topics) for the introduction of distance technologies and forms of learning in the educational process indicates the feasibility of using distance learning in the study of foreign languages. In today's conditions, almost all institutions of higher education are actively developing and implementing a system of distance learning, which ensures effective interactive and informational interaction between all participants in educational activities.

Theoretical and practical aspects of distance learning were considered in the studies of both foreign and home scientists: V. Bazhenova, P. Markov, K. Kolos, V. Kuklev, V. Vashchenko, D. Avetisyan, A. Melyuhin, J. Adams, G. Hoppe, J. Kettunen and others.

The ***purpose*** of our research is to clarify the possibility of integrating innovative computer technologies into online foreign language learning; to highlight the advantages of using distance learning.

The development of the Internet has fundamentally changed the approach to education. It is no longer necessary to attend a higher educational institution, as well as to move from your own home to another city for the purpose of obtaining higher education. Today, online education successfully copes with this task – it is enough to have a computer, laptop, tablet, and Internet connection at home. The spread of the Covid infection contributed to the accelerated mass transition of higher education institutions to online education not only in Ukraine but also throughout the world.

Current policies of the technocratic world are directed towards expanding international relations between countries and integration into the worldwide community. In this respect, proficiency in a foreign language is a key to international relations development, holding international conferences, cross-cultural interaction, and information exchange. This raises the necessity of finding new constructive ideas for optimizing and intensifying EFL teaching and learning processes. The rapid technological advancement has propounded «a better pattern to find new teaching models» *(Gilakjani, 2017: 95).*

After some time of online teaching and learning, we can come to the conclusion that distance learning does work, having both advantages and disadvantages. Luckily, we live in the era of modern technologies. Without them, we could not maintain the learning process. As almost all students own computers, smartphones, and the Internet, distance learning can go on without spending extra money. The Internet offers a large number of resources that can support teaching and learning practices in order to organize socio-constructivist, student-centered and task-based lessons *(Guerra, 2013).*

2. Online educational learning platforms

According to the estimate of the world organization UNESCO, held in March 2020, 1.5 billion students in 165 countries of the world did not have the opportunity to attend classes due to COVID-19. The Internet became the tool with which education around the world did not stop, and it became possible to get the desired education at any university in Europe, America, or even Asia. Due to the massive forced transition of education to the online format, higher education institutions face an urgent issue of creating appropriate modern online educational platforms as soon as possible and developing and implementing programs in the educational process that would help to obtain online education as best as possible. Electronic programs and courses are created and constantly improved by a team of highly qualified specialists.

Distance education platforms provide an opportunity to monitor the assimilation of the material. Based on the analysis of the literature, it was determined that **distance learning,** also called **distance education, e-learning,** and **online learning,** is a form of education in which the main elements include the physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. Distance learning has always focused on nontraditional students, such as full-time workers, military personnel, and nonresidents or individuals in remote regions who are unable to attend classroom lectures *(Sadeghi, 2019).*

The organization of teaching foreign languages in distance learning requires the coordination of the work between teacher and students, as well as the presence of an electronic educational environment organized by the teaching staff. *It is important to note* that most educational programs for learning foreign languages are divided into modules, which provide the possibility of using infographics, video materials, and podcasts that have, and also contain,

links to the necessary professional literature. The most common platforms for conducting classes in Ukraine, which provide the possibility of making video conferences, online lessons, and individual consultations, are currently Skype and ZOOM. In addition, these platforms turned out to be convenient for explaining new material, controlling pronunciation, developing reading and listening skills, and practicing speaking. Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, as well as Google Classroom, are used by teachers to transfer information, check work, test, and evaluate students. Google Classroom is a great time saver for teachers. On this platform, teachers set tasks for students and receive their work. There is no need to download the work of each student from the mailbox, as the work is located within Google Drive. Teachers can create a test with different types of questions, and type in the answers to the test questions, and the Google will check everything automatically, creating a list of grades of each student with the analysis of common mistakes. Popular testing programs are Quizizz.com, educational resources ProfeDeEle, Aprenderespañol, Lingolia, and VideoEle. Other educational platforms include ExpressDigibooks, Viber, MiiKlas, Na Urok, Youtube, and Liveworksheets.

In the process of foreign languages, distance learning, both synchronous means of learning (Zoom, Skype, Google Classroom, Viber video communication) and asynchronous (e-mail, blogs, online video lessons, study materials, including in the form of audio and video files on which children recorded their answers and sent to the teacher) are used.

3. Advantages and disadvantages of using distance learning in foreign language teaching

The past ten years have seen increasingly rapid advances in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. Modern higher educational establishments tend to use digital technologies and turn to online learning courses more than before, economizing time and providing better learning spaces. The latter is «multimodal, multicultural and multilingual, and they serve a number of purposes, from providing factual, reliable information and allowing learners to create individual or collaborative texts, to opening up fictional worlds and making games available for education» *(Stickler & Hampel, 2015: 63)*.

Indeed, the teacher's role in the online learning process has been transformed. He/she is no longer regarded as the person who just transmits the knowledge to the students. On the contrary, the teacher instead operates as a facilitator, advisor, manager, co-learner, and expert that orchestrates what they do. Thus, students can set about learning a foreign language in various ways, sharing their unique personal identity, skills, learning styles, strategies, and techniques. Such a turn challenges the conventional image of the dependent EFL learner in Ukrainian higher educational establishments *(Turchyn and others, 2017: 557)*.

Taking into account the communicative nature of foreign language teaching, literature analysis, and my own experience, the following advantages of distance learning foreign languages were singled out:

• all assignments are collected in one place, students receive homework reminders, tand the teacher has the opportunity to see all student grades for all assignments and provide feedback, and timely inform parents about their children's progress. Students can attach completed tasks in various formats;

• a great chance to learn from home, in comfortable conditions, with no need to commute to a university, so valuable time is saved. Moreover, if it's an online course, students are not limited to doing the tasks in the morning or afternoon, they can study in the evening or at night, which is more convenient for working students;

• one can pursue one's choice of education at any time in one's life. There is no control over the city, college, etc. One can live and study from anywhere while choosing distance learning programs. What is necessary is the most convenient computer and a good internet-speed connection. You may find online schools that specialize in your particular field or one that can provide a great general education. Either way, your options for education will be greatly expanded *(Fedynich, 2013)*;

• opportunities for people who may have trouble attending a traditional institution, such as stay-at-home mothers, people working full-time, or members of the military. Many online education programs allow you to work in your place, so you can fit your education into your schedule. Flexibility in distance learning programs gives you the chance to study without interfering with your personal life. If you are working, then you can always plan to learn about other features of your life, without affecting any disturbance to your personal or professional life. With distance learning courses, students can complete their coursework from just about anywhere, provided there's a computer and internet connection. This allows students to work when and where it is more convenient for them without having to squeeze in scheduled classes to an already busy life»;

• more knowledge of computer and Internet skills that one gains in the process of distance learning experience can also be moved to other sides of life.

At the same time, there are a lot of disadvantages to distance learning:

• if we talk about health, we should mention that both teachers and students spend much more time in front of the computer or other electronic device, damaging eyesight and posture. With the increased use of distance learning, the physical aspect of learning is often neglected *(Dolidze, 2013)*;

• students have to master a lot of theoretical materials on their own, they have to do a lot of tasks, as well as teachers have to work out tasks and check assignments. This can really affect the psychological and emotional mood. Distance learning is not just saying «do this and do that»;

• there should be interaction, feedback and support. Students lack live communication, as at university students do not only acquire knowledge, they also learn to interact in the society. So, we are speaking about the loss of interaction with other students in the classroom. In distance learning, study in a group is difficult, one just have to do by himself which becomes publicly one-off as there is no communication with other classmates. No chance for communicating with classmates and teachers orally. Though, a chat, e-mails, conferencing and bulletin boards, this problem is lessening gradually. The interactions help to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Many distance eduction programs have developed online forums or chat rooms for students to share ideas and communicate, but it is only a partial substitute for the interaction you get in the classroom with a teacher and other students. If the classroom environment is what you like most about learning you may want to take a step back and reconsider distance learning. You'll likely get some interaction on chat rooms, discussion boards and through email, but the experience will be quite different than traditional courses;

• some students ignore distance learning, and some of them have real excuses – no computers and the Internet. A similar thing is applied to teachers: there are still those who do not have enough computer skills. If we had been warned about the global quarantine, maybe we would have got prepared better and acquired new skills for that;

• cheating, we can't control how students do their tasks, they can use any source they want. So we can't examine their knowledge during online testing, we just check that they are resourceful and they continue studying. In some cases, we can check their knowledge in video apps, but when there are a lot of participants in an online video conference, we are limited in

time. So to deal with this, teachers need to be creative. They have to create tasks that cannot be done automatically, randomly clicking on answers in tests. Creativity and flexibility are quite important in online teaching and learning *(Omelchenko, 2020)*.

4. Conclusions

Thus, summing up, it is worth noting that the educational conditions for learning a foreign language in the modern world, gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic, are changing significantly from conventional classroom learning to distance learning. However, thanks to distance learning, students from remote areas have the opportunity to learn a foreign language and acquire a new language and communication skills. Online learning offers students flexibility, up-to-date information, rich and unlimited online resources, and the ability to be effective members of learning communities. However, despite the numerous merits for students, there are also disadvantages, namely, interpersonal interaction and communication between students deteriorates, lack of digital skills and resources, slow Internet connection, and others.

The study shows that the transition to online helped higher education institutions, teachers, students, and managers to open new opportunities and acquire new positive experiences while studying foreign languages. The future of distance education depends primarily on the creative use and development of new technologies. As learners become more aware of the potential to develop knowledge and skills more easily and conveniently, the need for new materials and presentation media should continue to increase.

Future work should focus on studying theoretical and practical aspects of online foreign language learning and constructing new effective distance learning courses with high academic content.

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