

DISTANCE LEARNING FOR DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The importance of using distance learning for developing knowledge, skills and competences in English Language teaching in contemporary educational process is justified in the article. In this connection the great attention is focused on radical changes in English Language teaching methodology. With the advent of online education the relationships between the lecturers or the tutors and the students alter and become more open and cooperating, because the students get more involved, interested and motivated in learning foreign languages. Apart from this, the main components of distance education are briefly considered.

Keywords: distance learning, E-learning technology, English Language Teaching (ETL), digital resources, digital generation (Gen-Y), webinar, blog, forum, chat, ICQ, Skype, on-line testing, interactive textbook, videoconference, second language learners.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЗНАНИЙ И НАВЫКОВ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ ПОСРЕДСТВОМ ДИСТАНЦИОННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ

В статье обоснована важность использования дистанционного обучения при формировании знаний, навыков и компетенций в английском языке в современном образовательном процессе. В связи с этим, огромное влияние уделяется радикальным изменениям в методологии преподавания английского языка. С появлением дистанционного образования взаимоотношения между преподавателями и студентами терпят изменения и становятся более открытыми и сотрудничающим, поскольку вовлечение студентов в сам процесс изучения иностранных языков повышает их заинтересованность и мотивацию. Помимо этого, кратко рассмотрены основные компоненты дистанционного обучения.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное обучение, E-learning технология, обучение английскому языку, электронные ресурсы, цифровое поколение (Gen-Y), семинар, блог, форум, чат, ICQ, Skype, электронное тестирование, интерактивный учебник, видеоконференция, обучающийся второму языку.

1. Nowadays many different approaches to higher education are discussed in the light of the requirements of the Russian Ministry of education and science and other educational authorities. The importance and necessity of satisfying the needs of population in education, providing with accessibility of a qualitative education and integration of education and scientific-technical achievements are usually emphasized.

Reforming scientific sphere and stimulating innovative activity as key sources of stable economic growth are directly associated with introducing E-learning technology (also distance learning or remote education) in the academic process. At present, a huge number of digital resources brings variety and usefulness in the educational process and add much to the learning and teaching experience. For example, web sites of world famous universities and organizations: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/research/libraries/index.html>; http://www.squire.law.cam.ac.uk/electronic_resources/; <http://lib.harvard.edu>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk>.

Technological opportunities affects education: with on-line courses a professor or an expert can teach at a time 60 000 students rather than 50 or 200 students at academician lectures in one auditorium.

The development of new information technologies and their implementation in the educational process for transferring knowledge and competencies is an integral part of our time. Information and communication technologies are effective means, methods and techniques to tackle major issues and to reach objectives of education. Learning foreign languages as component of the humanitarization of higher education is of great importance since it has been contributing to the development of coherent view of the world, education of values, building communicative connections, relationships and mutual understanding between different people, nations and cultures. Modern information and communication technologies play an invaluable role in this process.

Information technologies are changing the social and communication space and create new conditions for developing heuristic dialogue. A special role is given to the Internet communication (Web-forum, audio-video conferencing, chat, blog, e-mail, online file sharing, whiteboard, etc.), that enhance cognitive-communicative interaction. The Internet provides the real opportunities for simulation of training and information environment, with certain communication links and relationships being formed.

This specificity of Internet communications can be realized in the course of teaching foreign languages. Of course, on-line communication can't substitute direct or face-to-face communication, but at the same time, social networking significantly complements traditional education process by transferring it to the Internet.

2. Contemporary students are sometimes special – they need dedicated teachers who are responsible for encouraging them to explore the language and develop a love of learning it. Using digital resources helps the students study at the universities, stimulate their mind and allow them to learn by discovery.

English teachers, working with modern students, recognize that such learners think and behave differently than those from previous generations. These students were born in a world of information technologies; they regularly multitask and they trust the ideas of web videos more than their postulates in well-known textbooks. Digital generation or Gen-Y is significant and these young people constitute about 20 percent of the world's population. Many second language learners are supposed to belong to this group; and they demand our close attention and understanding.

Gen-Y originated in developed nations and they are increasing throughout the world. Whereas Gen-Y has received much attention in the academic literature of many fields, this is not yet the case in English Language Teaching (ELT) research. This lack of consideration is regrettable, as most Gen-Y'ers are currently English language learners. That is why teaching strategies should be aimed at engaging such learners in academic process.

3. E-learning, an area of English Language Teaching (ELT), continues to be of interest to both practitioners and students engaged in the field. E-learning course design is usually based on ELT contexts with using webinars, video clips, audio scripts, forums, charts, ICQ, Skype, on-line testing, interactive textbooks and boards.

E-learning technology tools are divided into two large groups:

- synchronous learning tools: chats, ICQ, SKYPE, interactive whiteboards, videoconferences;

- asynchronous learning tools: e-mail, blogs, forums, Twitter, video and audio podcasts, on-line testing.

The asynchronous nature of network communications allows the users to be engaged in a dialogue, forum, or chart at any convenient time, regardless of time or their location.

There are numerous advantages and disadvantages in both synchronous and asynchronous E-learning tools and data transmission.

Advantages of on-line synchronous communication tools:

- Useful to support face-to face contacts with the students;

- Sessions for decision-making become more efficient and effective;

- Give the feeling of direct voice contact in distance learning courses;

- Preserve the spontaneity and fluency of the speech similar to the real-life environment;

- Provide timely support of voice communication via instant feedback from the audience and management;

- Add immediacy, operative cooperation and personal contacts.

Advantages of on-line asynchronous communication tools:

- Give time and opportunity to consider the decision and think over the answer;

- Provide an opportunity for complete participation in the communication process at any time;

- The speech speed may be changed and the students with different language skills can be involved easily in the course;

- The ability to use low bandwidth communication channels;

- The participants of interaction do not depend on the time, the place, and the planning process;

- Participants should feel certain comfort when communicating in writing.

Disadvantages of on-line synchronous communication tools:

- The communication time is limited, there is little time for reflection left;

- The problem of planning may arise for the people in different time zones or those who are busy at work;

- They can require additional hardware and software;

- They require higher bandwidth channels for audio and video conferencing.

Disadvantages of on-line asynchronous communication tools:

- The participants experience lack of personal contact and verbal communication;

- It requires a longer period for group decision making;

- The feedback can be delayed for a few days or hours.

Such interactive tool as a webinar (from «Web-based seminar») can be attributed to both categories: synchronous and asynchronous e-learning. In the event of students' participation in online webinar and listening to the teacher's lecture in real time and asking him a question via chat, we deal with synchronous training. If the record of webinar was downloaded from the site some time ago, in this case we use an asynchronous type of webinar and E-learning.

Webinars are very convenient because the listeners and the participants can register for a webinar if they are interested in it, or watch recordings of the webinars if they fail to attend them in a real time.

We should re-think what we do in classrooms now and in the future. First, we are to reflect on our current practice and discuss whether the approaches and techniques are still relevant. However, we must also recognize that the students we are teaching today were born in the digital age, while many of their teachers were not. How will new digital elements change and add more value to our teaching? As a result, the teacher-tutor-student relationships have been affected by these changes.

4. Video communication is able to bring the world into your classroom and give your students the chance to have real communication in English and to create motivating language-learning activities. With the help of video conferencing tools like mailVU and Skype, the learners can download lesson plan, a video record and tutorial guide. The students can explore the world of digital images and how digital video and software can bring life into the classroom and be used to create motivating language-learning activities.

Video conferencing as a means of enhancing communication can be the subject of the discussion on the experimental and scientific research, management of the organization, the educational process. First desktop videoconference systems appeared in the mid 90s. Since then, they have been widely used by the organizations providing distance education services. According to the psychological research during a telephone conversation in the average about 20% of the information is perceived; in personal communication nearly 80% of all, which was said, is assimilated, and in video communication session this indicator reaches 60%. More than that, if the interlocutor's conversation is complemented with visual nonverbal language (gestures, facial expressions, body language etc.) on the sound channel, this visual accompaniment improves and increases the interlocutor's the efficiency of perception. Obviously, in video calls psycho-physiological parameters are somewhat equal to the face-to-face contacts and they greatly exceed the capacities of ordinal telephone communication.

However, in order to ensure effective video conversation in business or education process, it is insufficient just to see and hear only one interlocutor or partner. It is necessary to organize video conferences between several participants, providing exchange and transmission of additional information (presentations, documents, video images from additional cameras, chats with participants etc.). The technology of simultaneous transmission of video, voice and data is called video or teleconferencing. Today video conference technology is considered to be highly effective for the optimization of business processes through reducing transportation, overhead and other costs.

Nowadays video conferencing is not as expensive technology as it was few years ago, and both large companies and small business can afford it. In our country the use of video communication and video conferencing is optimal in the following cases:

a) if the value of working time for the management is so high as that arranging teleconference saves the cost of business trips;

b) if it is necessary to achieve a high level of learning, rapid assimilation of the knowledge and information, presented by the speaker or the lecturer;

c) if there is an objective necessity for face-to-face contacts and rapid decision making;

d) if in emergency situations you want to immediately arrange virtual meeting of numerous and extremely busy executives and experts of different levels, who are located in remote geographical areas.

Video conferencing for educational purposes usually create such kind of situation in which any participant has the opportunity not only to formulate his or her own outlook, but also to listen to each other's opinion and to compare their points of view.

Video conferencing allows saving time and affords. Further development of E-learning denotes a structured learning environment that integrates audio and video conferencing, text chat, interactive whiteboards, shared applications, tools of testing and feedback, forum and webinars. Thus, remote or distant learning process is performed through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous tools, while retaining the flexibility and convenience and expanding the quality and efficiency of both modes of communication.

In virtual communication, being intercultural by the character, the lecturer or professor should certainly take into account the specificity of linguistic means and resources, the rules of interaction, because of technological features that can not only contribute to the dialogue, but also complicate collaboration and understanding. The teacher or the lecturer faces both methodological and didactic tasks aimed at optimizing the communication process, which is determined by the ability to dialogue with the interlocutors, to formulate their thoughts, define the tasks, avoid the ambiguity of the messages, etc.

5. It is well known that fundamental paper dictionaries are obsolete. On the contrary, electronic dictionaries are characterized by frequent changes and availability of versions for a wide range of users. Therefore, computer dictionaries can be considered as current lexicography.

In reviewing of the results of electronic dictionaries implementation in the learning process it was found that students prefer to use handheld electronic dictionaries in the classroom. For the translation of the original texts on economics they use printed dictionaries or computer translator. The quality of such work is low and does not meet the required standards of translation. To increase interest in electronic dictionaries, it is necessary to develop a set of specific exercises that facilitate the acquisition of skills of using a dictionary.

Electronic dictionaries and electronic versions of printed dictionaries are widely available on the market of software and printed products at the moment. They form a good basis for simplification of the study of the English language.

Lingvo dictionary can translate a word and a phrase from Russian into English, Spanish, Italian, German and French. Russian-English dictionary contains 3,500,000 entries and consists of the following thematic dictionaries: universal, economic, computer, polytechnic, medical, legal, scientific, oil and gas, informal vocabulary words and expressions, as well as phrase and grammar book. The latest version is equipped with electronic dictionary Lingvo application Lingvo Tutor. This application allows you to learn new words, grouped by topics.

In addition to the actual computer dictionaries there is a large number of electronic versions of traditional dictionaries. Such foreign publishing houses as Longman, Cambridge University Press, McMillan release conventional dictionaries on the print substrate with an application disc which includes an electronic version of the dictionary.

McMillan dictionary has enormous potential. Its articles consist of the word itself, its transcription, definition and examples of use; each word is voiced by American and British speakers.

Longman dictionary has better method of vocabulary introduction and grammar material. The lexical material is presented with illustrations containing comments. This path helps to create visual images and the vocabulary, as a result, is absorbed much stronger. The introduction of grammar material is facilitated by the use of animated movies, demonstrating the use of the grammar construction. It also provides a solid basis for fixing grammatical models. This computer program has one more feature that differs it from a number of similar products. It contains grammar tests, covering all sections of grammar and PC versions of international tests TOEFL (Test of English for Foreign Learners) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). These tests include sections on testing skills in listening, speaking, writing and understanding of the written text in which the program gives the results and recommendations.

The use of audio-visual training aids, i.e. pictures, videos, audio fragments is considered as the great advantage of educational electronic dictionaries. The

uniqueness of electronic dictionaries consists in explaining grammatical phenomena both in a usual way and with the help of authentic dialogue, which is not typical for paper dictionaries.

Thus, electronic dictionaries should take an important part in the process of learning students at university. The techniques of using electronic dictionaries, their structure and the construction of entries will facilitate the translation process and make it more effective.

6. At the present time weblogs (blogs) are widely used in teaching process. A blog is a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete entries ("posts") typically displayed in reverse chronological order.

Personal blog enables every student to have his or her own web log. Students simply log on to the site to make their posts. These blogs are viewable to the entire class or just the tutor (at your option), and visitors can make posts or leave comments as well.

Topical (group) blog is a collaborative space where students and tutors can share ideas while discussing a common topic. The uses of this feature are only limited by the tutor's imagination. Again as the tutor, you control all access to these forums.

Assignment blog is a new feature that allows tutors to post assignments for the class and later grade them in a private secure setting. Students can work on assignments over multiple online sessions and then submit them when they are finished. Tutors can subsequently grade the assignment, offer guidance or comments, or return the assignment to the student for further work.

Blog gives an opportunity to extend the time of the course; it enables each student to take an active part in the process of communication in a foreign language, to implement the principle of individual approach to education.

It can be concluded that in the process of working with students the blog forms competencies in the following areas: foreign language listening comprehension of authentic material; written speech in a foreign language; creating and maintaining blog in a foreign language; searching for information on a given topic in a foreign language in the global network; analyzing the work, forming self-esteem in a foreign language.

7. The students' learning styles will be influenced by their genetic make-up, their previous learning and communicative

experiences, the technologies, the culture and the society they live in. Modern information technologies have a positive effect on academic process and greatly expand learning opportunities supplying Visual, demonstrative, easy to understanding presentations.

Students learn better and more quickly if the teaching methods used match their preferred learning styles. With the advent of online education the student-teacher or tutor relationship can be radically changed, because the students become involved in the learning process and get more interested and motivated in learning and rising self esteem.

The interest of teachers in higher education to new learning tools allows to see the educational opportunities of modern hardware and software in teaching a foreign language. The use of modern information technology can improve students' motivation to learn, their responsibility, the level of self-actualization, and form communication skills and intercultural competence. It can motivate stronger students to help others and strengthen the interaction between students. It can also give students a platform to discuss topics covered in class outside of university.

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