SPECIFIC FEATURES OF DISTANT TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN ESTABLISHMENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CONDITIONS OF BLENDED LEARNING

Abstract. The article deals with the features of distance learning of a foreign language in establishments of higher education in the context of blended learning, which also uses distance learning technologies to preserve the quality of learning. Blended learning is proposed to be seen as an educational approach that combines teacher participation (face-to-face) with online learning and provides elements of independent control of the student’s path, time, place and pace of learning, as well as integration of learning experience with teacher and online. Distance learning participants have been identified: a) teachers whose task is to prepare teaching material, place it in the electronic system of the university, monitor students’ activities during the semester, provide support and evaluate training (teachers can give material on the basis of the university and from any other locations); b) students whose task is to study the material offered by teachers and available on the portal of the university in synchronous and asynchronous modes, to perform homework, control and examination tests and assignments; c) administrator of the distance learning system, whose task is to manage the system. There are four reasons why we get tired during video sessions: 1) We need to focus more to read the non-verbal cues we are used to in face-to-face format; 2) Technical problems violate the naturalness of dialogue; 3) We are like on stage: we want to constantly look and sound perfect on camera, it creates additional tension; 4) Previously, communication was divided by location: we talked to family at home, with a professor – at university, with colleagues – at work, with friends – in a cafe or bar. Now we are locked in one place. Attention is focused on some advantages of the hybrid system, which include: a) absence of the need for the student to be constantly online, thus avoiding possible technical difficulties; b) all students have all the study materials.

Keywords: distance learning, foreign language, higher education institutions, blended learning, distance learning technologies.
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ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО ВИКЛАДАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ В ЗАКЛАДАХ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ В УМОВАХ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

Анотація. Статтю присвячену висвітленню особливостей дистанційного навчання іноземної мови в закладах вищої освіти в умовах змішаного навчання, за якого також використовуються дистанційні освітні технології, для збереження якості навчання. Змішане навчання пропонується розглядати, як освітній підхід, що поєднує навчання за участю викладача (віч-на-віч) з онлайн-навчанням і передбачає елементи самостійного контролю студентом шляху, часу, місця й темпу навчання, а також інтеграцію досвіду навчання з викладачем та онлайн.

Визначено учасників дистанційного навчання: а) викладачі, чиє завдання підготувати навчальний матеріал, розмістити його в електронній системі університету, відслідковувати активність студентів протягом навчального семестру, забезпечити підтримку й оцінити підготовку (викладачі можуть давати матеріал як на базі університету, так і з будь-яких інших локацій); б) студенти, чиє завдання вивчити матеріал, запропонований викладачами й наявний на порталі університету, виконувати домашні завдання, контрольні й екзаменаційні тести та завдання; в) адміністратор системи дистанційного навчання, завданням якого є управління системою. Виокремлено чотири причини, через які ми втомлюємося під час сесій відеозв’язку: 1) Нам потрібно фокусуватися більше, щоб зчитувати невербальні сигнали, до яких ми звикли у форматі face-to-face; 2) Технічні проблеми порушують природність діалогу; 3) Ми ніби на сцені: на камеру хочеться постійно виглядати та звучати ідеально, це створює додаткову напругу; 4) Раніше спілкування було поділено за локаціями: із сім’єю – у дому, з професором – в університеті, з колегами – на роботі, з друзями – у кав’ярні або барі. Тепер ми замкнені в одномісці. Увагу зосереджено на деяких перевагах гібридної системи, які включають: а) відсутність необхідності студенту бути постійно онлайн, тим самим уникнути можливих технічних труднощів; б) наявність у всіх студентів усіх навчальних матеріалів.

Ключові слова: дистанційне навчання, іноземна мова, заклади вищої освіти, змішане навчання, дистанційні освітні технології.

Problem statement. Among the methods of teaching foreign languages by means of using modern technologies, there are not so many that would attract as much attention as distance learning. The rapid development of Internet technologies has stimulated the unification of the efforts of researchers from the field of
information-and-communication technologies and the field of education, constantly working on the creation of technological resources and their introduction into the educational environment.

In 2020 teachers had to face the need to use remote technologies for conducting all types of classroom activities for the first time. In this regard, it was necessary to combine knowledge in the field of computer technologies and teaching methods, taking into account the special requirements for the distance learning system, some of which are often difficult to apply, for example, to conduct practical classes in a foreign language.

**Analysis of the latest researches and publications.** Important aspects of the use of distance learning technologies are covered by such Ukrainian scientists as L.V. Vasylchenko, M.I. Horishny, T.G. Marenchy, N.Ya. Panchyshyn, OA Terenda, N.M. Shatska.

**The purpose of the article** is studying specific features of distance teaching of a foreign language in establishments of higher education in the conditions of blended learning.

**Presentation of the main material.** Blended learning, in which distance learning technologies are also used, is the most favorable for maintaining the quality of education in modern conditions. Blended learning is an educational approach that combines teacher-assisted learning (face-to-face) with online learning and involves elements of self-control by the student of the path, time, place and pace of learning, as well as the integration of the learning experience with the teacher and online [2, p. 15].

Technically, the distance learning scheme is as follows: all participants in the process are connected to the Internet and can communicate with each other using it.

Participants are:
- teachers, whose task is to prepare educational material, place it in the electronic system of the university, track students’ activities during the academic semester, provide support and evaluate training (teachers can give material both on the basis of the university and from any other locations);
- students, whose task is to study the material offered by teachers and available on the university portal in synchronous and non-synchronous modes, to do homework, control and examination tests and assignments;
- administrator of the distance learning system, whose task is to manage the system.

The distance learning system can be used by both “traditional” and “remote” students.

In the context of a pandemic that has spread all over the world, the need to use information-and-communication technologies in online classes has increased dramatically. The traditional classroom education in teaching students has been replaced by various forms of distance, electronic and network learning [1]. A year ago, it was fashionable to talk about online tools at conferences, but now it’s impossible to do without them in a regular class.

When using computer technologies, the principle of visibility, which, according to T. P. Leontyeva, becomes the “principle of hypermedia visibility” changes qualitatively, since the use of multimedia technologies offers, for example, the possibility of
presenting material accompanied by musical or announcer design, animation, graphic inserts, video clips [4, p. 164]. Teachers prepare and post theoretical material, presentations, audio and video recordings, website lists, tests, examination materials on the university’s electronic portal. When selecting, placing and presenting material, the teacher must remember that the “remote” student should feel “in class”. This effect can be achieved by combining audio and video material. The main result will be an audio or video recording (for example, an explanation of a new material), which a “remote” student, unlike a “traditional” one, can listen to or view at a convenient time, play as many times as necessary for better memorization and assimilation of the material. Communication between the student and the teacher also takes place via the Internet. They have synchronous and non-synchronous methods at their disposal. The synchronous method includes chat and video conferencing. To the non-synchronous method refer e-mail and various instant messengers. Audio and video playback can be carried out in different quality, depending on the quality of the connection and the data transfer rate.

Teachers more than students are scared of total digitalization. The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine justifies itself to parents that distance learning is a temporary measure. As soon as the situation stabilizes, students will immediately return to their establishments of education and the educational process will become treditional again. We were afraid that during this time we could get gaps in teaching English to our students. After analyzing all the work done by us, as teachers of a foreign language, we made an interesting conclusion that digital technologies help weak students. Their results on the English language tests are 16-18 per cent higher than in traditional university education. This is because when a student works with a digital instrument, he immediately sees the error and can correct it. Usually in a lesson this is a long cycle: a student writes a test paper, passes it to the teacher and forgets. A week later, the teacher hands out the work, and there are examples that the student doesn’t remember his/her mistakes. We have already dealt with many of the difficulties associated with online learning. In this article we want to share a solution to a common problem in distance learning of foreign languages [3].

This is, of course, the impossibility of communicating face-to-face with a student. There are students in our online practice whom we only know by voice. It was not difficult for us to deal with them and we know why. Even during the first lockdown, the terms “Zoom fatigue” and “Zoom burnout” appeared [5].

Here are four reasons why we get tired during video calls:
1. We need to focus more to read the non-verbal cues we’re used to face-to-face.
2. Technical problems break the naturalness of the dialogue. For example, when there is a pause, we can’t immediately understand: if the student is just thinking or the connection is interrupted? Due to the delay, the interlocutor may seem to us less involved in the process.
3. It’s like we’re on stage: we want to look and sound perfect on camera all the time, this creates additional tension.
4. Previously, communication was divided by location: we communicated with the family at home, with a professor – at the university, with colleagues – at work, with friends – in a coffee shop or bar. Now we are locked in one place. Not everyone was ready for this. Someone is embarrassed by shabby wallpapers behind their backs, someone is not used to conducting serious negotiations in the kitchen in slippers.

Therefore, you need to give the interlocutor the right not to turn on the camera. This also gives the teacher certain advantages: you get less tired and can relax.

The learning option we have chosen for distance learning can be called a hybrid system. “Hybrid systems typically include a set of materials available on removable media or on the intranet of an establishment of education, with links to Internet resources and regular contact with teachers via e-mail, telephone or videoconferencing” [7]. In our case, all the main learning materials are available offline – textbooks, practical material, some audio materials, answer keys to all tasks (for teachers).

Some noted benefits of the hybrid system include:
- absence of the need for the student to be constantly online, avoiding thereby possible technical difficulties;
- availability of all teaching materials for all students.

A key problem in the implementation of a hybrid system is the issue of remote transmission of existing training materials and activities, especially rules and instructions. As it was noted, all classes are carefully planned in advance and many of them are performed in any available presentation option. Much of what the teacher says, asks or explains in the classroom, he/she prescribes and writes down in the presentation. Audio recordings of the teacher’s explanations are especially important for teaching foreign languages, since the student can both see the text and hear the pronunciation, which is impossible if the explanation of the material is presented only in written or printed format. The accompanying text explains the slides and gives them a finished look, and also speaks directly to the student, thereby inviting further communication, in addition, it serves as an instruction for working on oral perception.

Knowledge assessment is carried out continuously. The student receives most of the marks during the educational process, the rest – during the credit and examination tests. The final exam is mainly an assessment of the use of grammar, vocabulary and language skills, while language proficiency is assessed mainly in pre-examination tasks during practical exercises. This gives remote students more time to prepare and also reduces potential stress. Pre-examination tasks include:
- Progress Test (grammar, vocabulary and their application) is a two-page test performed in the middle of the semester and includes the material covered during the previous part of the semester. This test has a dual function. It should demonstrate a student’s progress and identify problem areas that need improvement. In addition, it serves as a model for the final exam, which is more or less similar in form, but much larger and covers all the material covered. This test is given in Word document format. “Traditional” students complete it in the classroom, while “remote” students are given limited time to complete it and send it to the teacher by e-mail.
- Oral Comprehension Test is a short test including 10 multiple choice and fill-in questions with a set time for both “distance” and “traditional” students. The system records the responses.

- Written Homework;

- Home Reading and Writing – students read texts appropriate to their level of training and complete tasks related to language learning, working with text and writing an essay. The high importance of reading foreign texts that are not exclusively professional and develop knowledge about the culture of speakers should be noted in teaching foreign languages;

- Oral Presentation – “traditional” students perform an oral presentation in the classroom in front of other students, while “remote” students record the presentation in the form of an audio or video file. Working on such a presentation model, the student prepares a speech on specialized professional topics. Unfortunately, this is the only mandatory form of oral communication and presentation of prepared material. Presentations prepared by “remote” students can be posted on the portal of the establishment of education. That will not only increase students’ awareness of public speaking, but will also invite other students to this type of activities.

The question becomes relevant, how not to lose control over the student?

1) Keep pace! Let the student be busy every minute!

2) If you deal with reading, be sure to set a timer so that there is no time to be distracted! Time must be short! Announce the student the time to read before the assignment: ‘You have 2 minutes to read the text and to find the answer, ok?’ . The average reading time depends on the student’s level, the volume of the text and the task itself. At the Pre-Intermediate level, the texts are small, the average student will read such a text in 2-3 minutes. At the Upper-Intermediate level, texts can take up a page, the average student reads such a text in 4-4.5 minutes.

And you also have an excuse to work on speed reading strategies – it will come in handy at the exam.

3) If you deal with oral comprehension, control the sound yourself! Sometimes you can pause the audio and ask a quick question: ‘What was said just now? Did you hear what the speaker said here?’.

4) If you deal with writing, write in a Google Doc or interactive whiteboard. This way you can see who works and who doesn’t work. In a Google Doc you can make a table with a separate row for each, or give students different parts of the page (top and bottom) so they don’t cheat. In Jamboard you can create a separate page for each. In Padlet everyone has their own column. On the Miro board and in Google Docs you can see when a student left the page – for example, to another tab – so you can catch those who decide to cheat.

How to make studying grammar online useful and interesting and how to help students who are embarrassed to actively participate in classes to open up.

- Think about the practical benefits! In what situations is the grammatical construction that you are studying needed? Hearing at the beginning of the lesson
“The Present Continuous is used to denote …” is boring. And online lessons open up new opportunities for us: you can quickly find a poster of your favorite movie, mark the countries you have visited on a Google map, or show your first profile picture on social networks. What grammar would be useful to talk about it?

- Ask questions! People are pleased when they are asked for their opinion, and not just told what to do. When explaining modal verbs, display a few sentences on the screen and ask students: “Here is ‘It must be in Spain’ – is it a fact or an opinion, what do you think? And how many per cent is a person sure of this opinion, 90 or 100?” This helps students to understand how to use these constructions in speech.

- Use the session rooms! When you explain a new design and give examples, it makes sense to do it in the common room so as not to repeat the same thing over and over. But when students begin to do the exercises, it is better to send students to the session halls for 2-3 people. There they will be able to suggest something to each other and check the answers together, and not wait in line while 10 other students read aloud one sentence at a time. The main thing is to give clear instructions: what needs to be done, what should be the result and how much time they have for this.

- Give students time to think! We are already used to the fact that online students can write us answers to questions in a chat. However, there are pitfalls here. As in a regular lesson, the most nimble people usually write to the chat. And those who think and type slower do not even try to write something. What for? After all, everything has already been written. Therefore, we suggest that students type their answer in the chat, but do not send it. And after a couple of minutes, we ask everyone to send messages at the same time. This levels out the students a bit and motivates those who otherwise would not have written anything.

For ourselves, we concluded that when studying grammar, you can use elements of the lexical approach. For example, ask how “must be” differs from “could be” and give examples that can be found in live speech. And the importance of grammar has not been canceled [6].

And finally, we want to talk about the experience of using video in an online English class. Ted Ed is a library of animated educational videos from the creators of the Ted Talks platform. They are convenient to replace boring text in a textbook or to supplement a topic that has not been worked out enough. The videos are short: 3-4 minutes, they have subtitles that are easy to download. You can find videos on any topic: even about space, even about love. The site has ready-made materials for teachers. Some videos are simpler, some are more complex. However, we use them with both intermediate and upper-intermediate groups. The lesson is based on the principle of working with any video – warm up -> lead in -> pre-watching activities -> while-watching activities + grammar / vocabulary focus -> after watching activities. We will show each step of the lesson for lower levels and for higher levels.

1. Warm up

- Lower levels: Show students pictures of a tennis racket, soccer ball, ski slope, puck and sneakers and ask students to guess what these items have in common and what the topic of today’s lesson will be!
- Higher levels: we also start with a brainstorm. We ask to name as many sports as possible, and then we sort the activities according to some criterion – from the most interesting to the most boring, from the most difficult to the easiest. We discuss in pairs and compare what happened, whether they agreed.

2. Lead in
- Lower levels: Offer to name as many team and individual sports as possible! Discuss what more fun / more dangerous / more interesting to watch!
- Higher levels: Start with the question “How playing sports benefits your brain?”! We throw ideas and are sure to write them down. When students watch the video, you can count how many they guessed.

3. Pre-watching activities
- Lower levels: We offer students a list of words from the video: runner’s high, endorphins, self-esteem, a growth mindset, build the resilience, to manage academic, social and physical hurdles and ask them to divide the words into 3 columns:
  - I know
  - I think I know
  - I don't know.
  
  We ask to read the words from the 1st column and to explain the meaning. If there are words that you can’t figure out, suggest students to use a dictionary. While watching you can ask to mark the words that they heard in the text.
- Higher levels. We introduce the question: “Which sports are more beneficial for you individual or team?”. We ask students who vote for team sports to gather in the right corner and come up with 3 arguments in support of this point of view, and those who vote for individual sports in the left corner and also justify. As students watch the video, you can ask them to cancel arguments that have already been made.

4. While-watching activities
- Lower levels: here you can give gap filling activities to students. On YouTube, if you click on the three dots below the video on the right and select Open transcript, then the text from the video will appear in the window on the right. From there, you can copy the sentences you need and easily create an exercise with missing or incorrect words.
- Higher levels. Students of higher levels will understand the ideas from the video from the first time. So they can be asked to compare them with what they discussed in the previous task – mark those ideas that they have already mentioned, add new ideas to their list.

5. Vocabulary / grammar focus. The video on Ted Ed has a lot of interesting vocabulary. Choose what you find useful for students! Again, you can use the transcript to find the right words or collocations. You can work out vocabulary in Quizlet or Wordwall. It takes only 5 minutes to create a set of 5-8 new words.

The most important problem, in our opinion, is the issue of motivation of “remote” students. With regard to teaching a foreign language course, which is aimed not only at acquiring knowledge, but also at some skills, including communication,
the problem of motivation seems to be the most important. The teacher’s fundamental task in the preparation of the material and the implementation of the course is the question: How to maintain a high level of interaction in a virtual environment with limited direct contact? The key problem for students remains the lack of opportunities for direct oral interaction with classmates, as well as with the teacher. To mitigate the feeling of students’ isolation in distance learning and strengthen their sense of belonging to a group and an establishment of education, it is necessary to give situational tasks for their solution by a group and then send it to the teacher’s e-mail (for example, the development of a group project on a given topic). It is planned to pay more attention to such tasks in the future.

It should be noted that the results of students’ progress during distance learning are generally higher than in traditional, full-time education. As it was mentioned above, there are many reasons for this. Of course, one can’t say that the distance learning is superior in efficiency to the traditional one, but we would like to note that in distance learning students have the opportunity not to miss the material of the classroom lesson (if they missed it in the classroom). Audio and video broadcasts, as well as a variety of methods of synchronous and non-synchronous communication, make it possible to compensate for the lack of presence in a face-to-face lesson.

**Conclusions.** In conclusion, it must be said that the use of distance learning in teaching foreign languages is a test. The biggest problem is the lack of direct communication with classmates and the teacher. The use of modern tools for synchronous and non-synchronous communication helps to overcome this problem. The author’s experience relates to teaching only English, but it is quite applicable to teaching other foreign languages. Our observations, despite some concerns, are very positive; nevertheless, there is a lot of additional work to be done to improve the curricula, modify them and improve the quality of multimedia materials. We are convinced that pedagogical qualifications in tandem with modern technologies make it possible to implement successful teaching of foreign languages remotely.

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