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DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE KEY ASPECTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Distance language learning has unique challenges which can be explained by the peculiarities of language learning. Distance language courses should be designed in the way that provides a wide range of opportunities for language learners for interaction and successful second language acquisition. The present article focuses on the key aspects aimed at providing the sufficient language input and output; develops the guidance for effective course design regarding the complexities of distance language learning and the factors which influence learners' communicative competence. It also analyses two approaches to distance learning from the perspectives of effective development of language communicative skills.

Keywords: *distance language learning; asynchronous learning; synchronous learning; ESL; language proficiency; language distance program.*

Introduction

Nowadays, when English has already become a truly international language and when Ukraine is rapidly integrating into the international society, the necessity of learning this language is obvious. This is the English language that has occupied one of the key positions in international cooperation development as well as cultural and information exchange among the representatives from many countries all over the world.

Language program leadership and curriculum is a central aspect of the teaching of English as a vibrant and rapidly growing area of education worldwide. Management and curriculum in English language teaching operates within a rapidly changing global environment with multiple and diverse expectations and clientele that require innovative approaches as well as strong and diverse leadership skills. Learning a foreign language can be interesting, stimulating and fun. It can also be difficult, frustrating and boring. In order to maximize the chances of long-term success, it is important to consider which approach to language learning will provide learners with the most benefits during their distance learning.

The speed of information age and developing educational technology have changed the ways of instruction and the level of knowledge gained during instruction. The development beginning with distance education turned into computer-assisted education, and then web-based education. Finally came the electronic learning, which is a subcategory of distance learning using the information technology. E-learning has many uses for instructors and learners in terms of the quality of education and has a profound impact on in-class instruction.

The usage of distance learning methods in foreign language learning provides real benefits to the learners who are motivated to acquire the language.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

Distance language learning is relatively new notion.

The past two decades have seen a growth in distance and online language learning. The Open University in Britain has been at the forefront of this, with a current population of approximately 9,000 language learners. At the same time, the nature of classroom-based language learning has been changing with the introduction of distance learning elements brought about by technological developments. Learners and teachers in these blended environments potentially experience similar challenges to those involved in more traditional distance settings, and they are likely to benefit from insights gained in distance learning research.

The last decade has seen a dramatic expansion of distance education with new language learning opportunities being made available to new audiences throughout the world. Many language learners, teachers and researchers have sensed the convenience and potential of new language learning environments in distance education – and in related fields such as online learning, distributed learning and blended learning. Important themes explored in the literature include traditional and emerging paradigms for distance language learning, the development of hybrid learning opportunities, course development and evaluation, teaching roles, learner support, the advent of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and new learning spaces, technology choice in particular sociocultural contexts, and learner contributions to the process of distance language learning.[11]

The issues of distance teaching technologies in the teaching process are discussed in the works of both Ukrainian and foreign teachers, including O.O. Andreev, E.I. Dmitrieva, V.M. Kukharenko, V.P. Sviridyuk, U.M. Horvits, N.V. Mayer, N.I. Mulina, K.U. Kozhukhov, E.S. Polat, A.V. Khutorskoi, G. Dudeney, N. Hockly and others. A significant body of work has been developed on teacher education at a distance (e.g. Howard & McGrath 1995; Nunan 1999; Cheng & Myles 2003).

In terms of research approaches to exploring distance language learning, there has been a heavy predominance of descriptive studies (e.g. Rothenberg 1998; Rogers & Wolff 2000), with surveys (Williams & Sharma 1988; Abrioux 1991), case studies (Crooks & Lamy 1995; Jennings 1995), pilot studies (Glisan, Dudt & Howe 1998) and multiple-method qualitative studies (White 1999a). Within the descriptive studies a prominent approach is to describe the process of course development and decisions about course elements for particular languages.

At the turn of the millennium there was only one edited collection devoted to distance language teaching (Richards & Roe 1993) whereas in the past five years three book publications have appeared including two edited collections (Henrichsen 2001; Holmberg, Shelley & White 2005) and one authored book (White 2003). Seminal articles on distance language learning have appeared in TESOL Quarterly, The American Journal of Distance Education, System and ReCALL, and in 2003 special issues of Open Learning and Language Learning and Technology were devoted to languages in distance education [11]

Problem formulation. Distance learning was implemented in the Ukrainian education system a few years ago. The main legal acts that regulate distance learning in Ukraine are as follows: The Law of Ukraine "On Education"; The Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education"; The Law of Ukraine "On the National Program of Informatization"; The concept of distance learning in Ukraine; Decree of the President of Ukraine from 31. 07. 2000, № 928/2000 "On measures to develop national component of the global information network Internet and provide wide access to Internet in Ukraine"; Order of Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On approval of distance learning" 25.04.2013, № 466; Order of Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On Approval of Requirements for universities and graduate schools, scientific, educational and research institutions that provide educational services for distance learning with training and improving qualifications for accredited direction of study and specialties" from 10. 30. 2013, № 1518 and some others. [5]

Distance learning itself is a relatively new phenomenon to our national educational system. As for the distance language learning, it is worth being mentioned that many language learners, language teachers and institutions are coming to distance language education for the first time. Western and Ukrainian methodologies have been researching the peculiarities of computer assisted language learning and the problems of distance foreign language learning. As it was previously mentioned, lots of articles based on the thorough researches concerning different aspects of distance language learning have been written. However, the methodology of distance language learning is still being developed though lots of computerized programs for foreign language learning have been implemented in distance language education.

Relevance of the article is caused by the need of implementation of telecommunication and information technology into the teaching process providing high efficiency gain of language knowledge, profound formation of communicative skills, as well as enhancing the interest of students in studying. The aim of this article is to analyze the key aspects of distance language education and to define the features of the integration aspect of distance teaching and justify the content, some principles, and approaches of distance language education.

The main material research

Adult life for many is complex and demanding. Many adults are unable to or unwilling to attend traditional adult language classrooms for many reasons. These adults are prime targets for distance language learning. They are motivated to develop their language training, but limited by circumstances. Flexible learning approaches that are not classroom centered appeal to these potential learners.

Distance learning extends educational opportunities to geographically, temporally or organizationally challenged populations. Prior to the internet, interactive television, and other forms of wireless electronic access, distance education was traditionally the realm of off-campus education sites and correspondence courses. Today, these low-tech methods of instructional delivery remain a fundamental component of distance education. Specifically, for a number of special populations with limited or no access to the information superhighway, distance learning opportunities remain a significant challenge.

More traditional forms of distance language learning that used print, audio and video materials are being supplemented by opportunities for interaction and collaboration online. The social and technological changes that prompted expansion are also transforming the nature of distance learning. They have resulted in new contexts for learning, new ways of learning and new roles and responsibilities for participants.

There is now broad interest in innovation in distance language learning, both from distance language professionals, and from others who are interested in the possibilities offered by online learning environments. A number of factors have invited new providers to enter the field: convenience, accessibility, personal time management in learning process and acquiring the material, availability. There are, of course, downsides to distance courses: lack of self-motivation, low level of self-discipline, feeling of isolation, lack of practical experience, poor time management skills.

Learning a second language at a distance poses a tremendous challenge to learners. Physical distance from teachers and peers coupled with possible isolation from the relevant language community makes language learning extremely difficult. However, live interaction supported by synchronous learning management systems (SLMS) over the Internet holds great potential to address various difficulties facing distance language learners. [13]

Online teaching can be asynchronous-based or synchronous-based; the former provides learning activities such as surfing web contents, participating in forum discussion, and completing online quiz and homework assignments, while the latter provides learning activities which are similar to those conducted in traditional face-to-face classroom. [4]

By allowing students and instructors to negotiate linguistic issues together in real-time virtual settings, the interactive functions of such systems online chat, whiteboards, and videoconferencing technology can help foster vital learning communities in second language instruction. [13]

Remotely deployed and special operations personnel represent challenging military populations with needs for asynchronous distance learning opportunities. Asynchronous distance language learning involves learning opportunities that can be accessed at any time, and which make use of, for example, print, video, CD-ROM, e-mail and computer conference discussions. The advent of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has provided a range of possibilities for asynchronous communication, through e-mail, discussion lists, computer conferencing and bulletin boards. In distance language courses that make use of CMC, new opportunities for interaction with the teacher and with other learners counter the traditional and awkward isolation of distance language learners. CMC has also opened up possibilities for interacting with native speakers in tandem learning opportunities.

The advantage of asynchronous interaction is that learners can participate and respond at their convenience, there is time for thought and reflection between responses, and it is possible to revisit discussions at a later date. Asynchronous delivery offers flexibility to learners in that access to the course content or communication can take place at any time, and from different places. Voice mail, for example, has been used in language courses to provide students with listening and speaking practice. Asynchronous systems have a number of other practical advantages, in that they are generally cost-effective for the institution and for the individual, and they are not confined to particular schedules or time zones.

Synchronous distance language learning uses technologies that allow for communication in 'real time', for example by telephone or chat rooms. Synchronous systems can be highly motivating in that distance learners feel less isolated and gain energy and inspiration from the learning group. It is noted by the researchers that this can be further enhanced by the fact that real-time interaction with its opportunity to convey tone and nuance helps to develop group cohesion and the sense of being part of a learning community.[12] Thus synchronous interactions may feel more like a live conversation, and are more spontaneous. Feedback plays a very important role in distance language learning, and synchronous systems permit immediate feedback by the teacher, as well as providing opportunities for the development of feedback within the learning group. One of the key

challenges in distance language learning is the development of interactive competence, particularly in real time, and synchronous learning opportunities are important for this.

However, not all learners respond equally well to the loss of flexibility that is part of synchronous distance learning. While some learners prefer the structure provided by the regular timing of synchronous delivery – to have the course delivered in regular sessions at fixed times and to have their learning paced in this way – others find it a very real limitation.

Many distance education providers now combine synchronous and asynchronous forms of delivery in order to bring together the benefits of both forms of provision. This is the most common way in which different media are used in distance language learning – to work together in a complementary fashion. One example is a satellite television Internet-based distance language programme called English Business Communication developed by Christine Uber Grosse (2001). The course brought together the following elements: interactive satellite television linking remote classes (synchronous); Internet-based web board for holding chats during office hours (synchronous), for posting and reviewing homework and for class announcements (asynchronous); e-mail for sending messages, homework and feedback on submitted work (asynchronous); face-to-face meetings held at the start of the course as part of an orientation week (synchronous).[12]

Distance learning technologies present many new options for teaching foreign languages that will further expand the range of instructional techniques in the same way that language labs, television, and computers have augmented the standard classroom. It is important in reviewing these distance learning options to distinguish among their various levels of capability as these systems place different constraints on the instructional process.

The success of distance learning in developing students' foreign language skills depends on the ability of the instructional program to provide language learning in face-to-face settings.

Distance language learning regarding its peculiarities sets specific demands for language teachers. The distance learning teacher should be an experienced master teacher with proven proficiency in the target language. The teacher should be certified at the appropriate grade level. He/She should receive training with hands-on practice with the classroom hardware and software. The teacher should also receive training in the effective use of distance learning technologies and in techniques that encourage a high level of interactivity between the teacher and the student, between students at each distance learning site, and between students at different sites. If possible, the distance learning teacher should attempt occasional site visitations.

The knowledge, skills and attributes required by both distance and face-to-face language teachers depend on the roles which they are expected to

undertake. In distance education, tutors are part of a support network comprising three basic functions: cognitive support and development through mediation of the course materials and learning resources for individual students; affective support in developing a positive learning environment fostering commitment and self-esteem, and systemic support through administrative procedures and information management systems which are effective, transparent and student-friendly [10]. Mishra notes that distance tutors usually perform cognitive functions, but in many institutions they perform affective functions and a knowledge of institutional systems is also crucial. [6]

Essential skills, attributes and knowledge for distance language teacher are the following:

1. Personal qualities: the distance learning teacher should be flexible, open minded, enthusiastic/committed, patient, friendly, respecting individuals, positive, attentive, approachable, encouraging and supportive.

2. Pedagogical expertise: the distance learning teacher should be able to offer useful language models, exploit material for students benefit, encourage students to locate and use resources in their environment.

3. Linguistic expertise: the distance learning teacher should understand how students acquire grammar, provide appropriate help with grammar, be up-to-date with cultural/linguistic development of target language countries.

4. IT skills: the distance learning teacher should have basic computer literacy skills, use web resources for communication and information between individual, institution and learner, use e-mail (First Class) for communication with learners and institution, use text/audio conferencing, be aware of relevant resources.

5. One-to-one interactive support skills: the distance learning teacher should establish a friendly atmosphere, adapt to students language levels, provide unambiguous, individualised, and prompt feedback using language at the appropriate level, understand learners needs/strengths, spot problems students may be hiding, keep in touch regularly.

6. Acknowledge feelings: the distance learning teacher should possess excellent self management, be well organized with records/materials, exercise discipline in time keeping, prioritize.

7. Management skills: the distance learning teacher should establish a friendly and communicative atmosphere, allow space for students to think/talk, design tutorial activities where student involvement predominates.

It is clear that a distance learning teachers should as well possess professional skills and responsibilities, know the course materials well, help/facilitate/inform about self-directed learning, share good practice, and know organizational procedures well. In distance learning teachers are more facilitators than teachers. They are not teaching new language forms as they do in a face-to-face context, but rather providing

opportunities for students to practice and use what they have already studied.

The most obvious difference between the two teaching environments is, of course, that distance tutors may never actually meet students in person. Tutors clearly try to help students overcome their potential isolation. In relation to overcoming student isolation from both the tutor and from fellow students the need to articulate non-verbal communication and interpret unseen reactions rather than making assumptions or taking things for granted is highlighted. Distance tutors have to provide students with a range of strategies which they can use to develop their pronunciation, or other language skills, on their own, rather than deciding to set up some relevant group activities as she might do with a class. Explicit articulation of advice and examples in feedback on assignments is also felt to be an important skill.

Each receiving site should have a classroom facilitator whose duties should include monitoring student participation. The facilitator should be a certified teacher preferably with some background in a foreign language. The classroom facilitator should participate in appropriate inservice to prepare her/him for her/his role. A technician, rather than the facilitator, should assume responsibility for the smooth running of the equipment.

When speaking about distance language learning, it is necessary to mention the technology without which distance education is impossible. Here are some problems worth being mentioned: the cost of the technology, and the possibility of not utilizing all its potential. Some of these problems arise from a lack of training, some from the instructor's attitudes about using the technology, and still others by hardware problems. It seems to be self evident that instructors need to be trained to use distance learning technology, but too often they are not. Once again, it appears that administration may feel that the technology itself will improve the course. Advancement in technology does not lead to effective distance education. The best distance education practices depend on creative, well-informed instructors. Bates suggests that newer technologies are not inherently better than old ones and many of the lessons learned from the application of older technologies will still apply to any newer technology. Again, the instructor should be trained to take advantage of both their experience and being able to adapt that experience to the new environment of distance learning. The instructors must be trained not only to use technology, but also to shift the way in which they organize and deliver material. [3]

Concurrent delivery of instruction to multiple sites does not always provide the interactivity that is essential in foreign language learning. It is preferable that the number of connections and number of students of distance learning classrooms be limited to allow for meaningful practice of interactive instructional activities. Teacher-student interaction is essential to quality foreign language teaching and learning. The distance learning teacher should extend

instruction and enhance interactivity via e-mail, phone calls, chatrooms, and/or a class Web site.

If the purpose of a distance learning program is to teach a foreign language, then the program must provide instruction that fosters creative interaction both among and between learners and with a native or near-native speaker of the language. This interaction should occur in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture.

For distance learning to be a viable alternative to conventional classroom instruction, it must be consistent with current research and practice that focus on developing the learner's language proficiency. Proficiency, that is, what the learner can do with the language rather than what he or she knows about it, is the major principle around which today's foreign language teaching and curricula are organized. Distance learning programs must, therefore, provide a mechanism for a major portion of class time to be devoted to meaningful language use and practice and to authentic communication. Thus, foreign language distance learning programs should be created with the considerations of the following issues. [8,9,11]

1. The foreign language curriculum should incorporate interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes of communication.

2. Foreign language distance learning programs should be interactive in the foreign language.

3. The program should offer a variety of instructional activities to include listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as social and cultural information.

4. The program should provide regular oral interactions between each student and a certified foreign language teacher or a native speaker

5. Each distance learning class should be formally evaluated every definite period of time.

6. Foreign language distance learning classes should be limited.

7. The regular use of other media, such as computers, speech recognition devices, audiotapes, and workbooks should be implemented into the course to provide a comprehensive approach to distance learning

8. The distance learning teacher should be an experienced teacher with proven proficiency in the target language. He should receive hands-on training with the technology used to offer the course.

9. The distance learning teacher should be extremely well organized so that students are

informed of scheduled activities well in advance. A schedule should be provided regularly.

10. There should be timely feedback on student performance. The teacher should grade and return student work (tests, assignments, projects, etc.) within a set number of working days.

11. A technical support staff should be provided to install, maintain and upgrade equipment.

Conclusion

The last decade has witnessed an enormous expansion in distance language learning opportunities. Rapid developments in information and communications technology, together with societal changes, have increased awareness of and demand for distance education – and now also for online learning. The development and wide availability of the new technologies for connecting learners and teachers, the rapid pace at which these have developed, and the widespread publicity have attracted the potential learners. A wide range of distance learning technologies are used today for developing language skills; the requirements for tutors' experience, needed skills and experience have been stated; the requirements for organizing a successful and fruitful distance language course have been developed.

However, we must admit that there is a need for further researches of distance language education. Particular attention should be paid to the design of the course, its careful planning based on thorough needs analysis of the potential language learners. Teachers should work out the courses that encourage students to interact, discuss the meaning of the course, its characteristics and features. Distance language courses can provide a viable alternative to students who are geographically isolated or in need of flexible teaching environments. Learners must have the opportunity to interact in the target language to negotiate meaning, make input more comprehensible, get feedback, and recognize the need to change their language to achieve successful communication. In addition, an understanding of learning strategies and learner characteristics is critical to closing the gap – the distance between the learner and the teacher, or the learner and other learners. These areas of research encompass sometimes overlapping concepts such as cognition, metacognition, motivation, autonomy, and self-regulated learning. Prospects of further new scientific studies are to examine the theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and to develop distance language education courses.

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ДИСТАНЦІЙНЕ НАВЧАННЯ МОВИ: КЛЮЧОВІ АСПЕКТИ УСПІШНОГО ЗАПРОВАДЖЕННЯ У ПРАКТИКУ

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Дистанційне навчання іноземної мови має певні особливості, пов'язані зі специфікою власне процесу навчання іноземної мови. Дистанційний курс вивчення іноземної мови повинен бути розроблений таким чином, щоб забезпечити слухачів можливістю мовленнєвої взаємодії та успішного опанування мовним матеріалом. Дана стаття присвячена вивченню основних аспектів дистанційного навчання іноземної мови, які впливають на якісне подання мовного матеріалу та результативність його засвоєння. У статті наводяться характеристики ефективного мовного курсу, що безпосередньо пов'язані з особливостями дистанційного навчання іноземної мови та факторами, які впливають на комунікативну компетенцію слухачів. У статті також проаналізовані підходи до дистанційного навчання іноземної мови з точки зору ефективного формування комунікативних навичок слухачів.

***Ключові слова:** дистанційне навчання іноземної мови; синхронне навчання; асинхронне навчання; мовна компетенція; дистанційний курс.*

ДИСТАНЦИОННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ ЯЗЫКУ: КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ УСПЕШНОГО ВНЕДРЕНИЯ В ПРАКТИКУ

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Дистанционное обучение иностранному языку имеет определенные особенности, связанные со спецификой самого процесса обучения иностранному языку. Дистанционный курс изучения иностранного языка должен быть разработан таким образом, чтобы обеспечить слушателей возможностью языкового взаимодействия и успешного овладения языковым материалом. Данная статья посвящена изучению основных аспектов дистанционного обучения иностранному языку, которые влияют на качественную подачу языкового материала и результативность его усвоения. В статье обозначены характеристики эффективного языкового курса, непосредственно касающиеся особенностей дистанционного обучения иностранному языку и факторов, влияющих на коммуникативную компетенцию слушателей. В статье проанализированы подходы к дистанционному обучению иностранного языка с точки зрения эффективного формирования коммуникативных навыков слушателей.

***Ключевые слова:** дистанционное обучение иностранному языку; синхронное обучение; асинхронное обучение; языковая компетенция; дистанционный курс.*

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