

## DISTANCE LEARNING AS A MEANS OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT NON-LINGUISTIC HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS: PROS AND CONS

### ДИСТАНЦІЙНА ОСВІТА ЯК ЗАСІБ НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ У НЕЛІНГВІСТИЧНИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ: ПЕРЕВАГИ ТА НЕДОЛІКИ

*The article is devoted to the problem of reasonability of distance learning technologies application in teaching foreign languages at non-linguistic higher educational establishments. Social and economic background for developing the innovative forms of study by means of information communication technologies, distance learning in particular, is considered. The definition of distance learning is given, the reasonability of its application in foreign languages study at non-linguistic higher educational establishments in Ukraine, is considered. Distance learning forms classification according to the way of transferring knowledge are considered, synchronous and asynchronous learning in particular. Advantages and disadvantages of distance learning are investigated. The issues of students' knowledge control and self-control organization are studied. They have great influence on the efficiency of distance learning process. Various types of knowledge control should substitute the lack of oral communication which is of great importance in traditional study and is almost absent in distance learning. Some requirements to students' knowledge monitoring organization are considered. The problem of imitating verbal communication by means of software is studied. Some methods of students' verbal answer analysis by means of information communication technologies are investigated, in order to compare it with the expected result. The peculiarities of distance learning organization, which is based on the principles of students' independent study and is mostly out-of-class activity, are considered. The main goal of distance learning is identified, that is to transform the student into an active subject of the process of study. The efficiency and reasonability of applying information communication technologies in the process of distance learning of foreign languages at non-linguistic higher educational establishments, are highlighted.*

**Key words:** distance learning, distance education, advantages and disadvantages, knowledge monitoring, information communication technologies, foreign languages.

*Стаття присвячена проблемі доцільності використання технологій дистанційної*

*освіти для навчання іноземних мов у нелінгвістичних закладах вищої освіти. Досліджуються соціально-економічні передумови для виникнення та розвитку інноваційних форм навчання засобами інформаційних комунікаційних технологій, дистанційного навчання зокрема. Розкрито сутність такого поняття, як дистанційне навчання, та доцільності його запровадження для навчання іноземних мов у нелінгвістичних закладах вищої освіти в Україні. Розглянуто класифікацію форм дистанційного навчання іноземних мов відповідно до способу передачі знань, а саме синхронного й асинхронного навчання. Досліджено переваги та недоліки дистанційного навчання. Висвітлюються проблема організації контролю та самоконтролю знань студентів, від якого залежить ефективність дистанційного навчання. За умови відсутності або незначного відсотка вербальної комунікації студента та викладача у процесі дистанційного навчання різноманіття форм і методів письмового контролю знань студентів набуває неабиякої важливості. Розглянуто вимоги до організації моніторингу знань студентів. Висвітлюється проблема імітації вербальної комунікації засобами відповідного програмного забезпечення. Досліджуються способи аналізу відповіді студента засобами інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій із метою визначення її відповідності очікуваному результату. Розглядаються особливості організації дистанційної освіти, що базується на принципах самостійної роботи студентів і здійснюється переважно поза межами традиційних аудиторних занять. Визначається головна мета дистанційного навчання, що полягає у перетворенні студента на активного суб'єкта навчання. Підкреслюється ефективність і доцільність використання інформаційних комунікаційних технологій у процесі дистанційного навчання іноземних мов у нелінгвістичних закладах вищої освіти.*

**Ключові слова:** дистанційне навчання, дистанційна освіта, переваги та недоліки, моніторинг знань, інформаційно-комунікаційні технології, іноземні мови.

UDC 378.147.018.43:811.111  
DOI <https://doi.org/10.32843/2663-6085/2019.21.3-47>

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The role of information technologies in modern system of higher education is very important nowadays. Constant development of information technologies, their improvement, transformation to absolutely different level of virtual relations and communication lead to inevitable changes in educational environment of higher educational establishments. Different web technologies such as on-line classes, webinars, etc. are becoming more and more popular.

Innovative educational technologies create favorable conditions for the students to master the information, which help them not only to apply the necessary knowledge and skills gained, but also to use them for their future professional practice, for making creative decisions, and defending their own opinions.

Application of innovative information technologies in the process of education enables to increase the opportunities of all its participants. It creates

great potential for the students of all ages and forms of education to get the information in the amount necessary for their self-development and self-perfection. Distance learning application in teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments provides great opportunities for conducting research, participating in different experiments, creating new types of communication and interference between the lecturer and the student.

**Target setting.** The goal of this research is the substantiation of the necessity to apply new information technologies, distance learning in particular, while teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments, and also stating its strengths and weaknesses.

One of the main problems in teaching foreign languages at the current stage is lack of time allotted for studying a foreign language. Therefore, the issue of applying new technologies while teaching foreign languages raises more and more often lately. They include not only new hardware, but also new forms and methods of teaching, new approaches to training process. Distance learning which is based on the principles of students' independent study is one of the best ways out.

**Last scientific researches analysis.** The problems of distance learning are considered in many research works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists. The issues of distance learning development and establishment in Ukraine were revealed in the works of N. Kazarynova, B. Shunevych, H. Yatsenko. Many works of A. Andreiev, V. Bykov, Y. Polat, A. Khutorskoi, D. Painter, P. Valiathan, A. Rossett, R. Vaughan Frazze, R. Schank, C. White, A. Bates are devoted to general theoretical issues of distance learning. The notion of distance learning is also investigated by V. Kuharenko, D. Matuhyn, Y. Gubahar, M.R. Simonson and others.

**The article's purpose.** In this article we consider distance learning as one of the effective methods of learning and teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments. The goal is to determine the efficiency of applying distance learning at higher educational establishments of Ukraine, to identify its advantages and disadvantages.

**Issues to be researched.** Taking into account the point, that distance learning technologies differ greatly from the traditional ones, it's necessary to conduct the corresponding scientific and practical research. The research should investigate the following issues:

- reasonability of applying distance learning for teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments;
- advantages and disadvantages of distance forms of study;
- the peculiarities of arranging students' knowledge monitoring.

**The statement of basic material.** Distance learning is the form of educational process organization in which mastering a subject, e.g. a foreign language, is conducted at distance by means of information communication technologies.

Distance learning in Ukraine has been applied since 2000, and is regulated by The Concept of Distance Education Development in Ukraine and by the Provision on Distance Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine [4, p. 1].

Distance learning is 1) a set of information technologies providing the students with the main amount of the materials studied; 2) interaction of students and lecturers in the process of study; 3) providing the students with the opportunity to work independently and also guided by the lecturer in order to master the information studied [1, p. 375].

The social aspect of distance learning is very important. Many countries have distant education curriculums for getting not only the higher but also complete secondary education. It is of great value for disabled children and adults. For this category of people, it can be the only way for getting education, as distant forms of education do not limit people's mobility. Virtually people can cross national borders, work distantly, and even travel. Under the current situation of coronavirus in China, many Chinese students studying at foreign universities are deprived of an opportunity to attend classes, so distance learning may become the way out for them in order not to fall behind in their studies.

Distance learning technologies are divided into two categories according to the way of transferring knowledge: synchronous and asynchronous learning. In the case of synchronous learning of foreign languages all the students "attend" classes at the same time. That's why, this method of study is similar to the traditional one, though all the participants stay at distance. It's necessary to have an agreed schedule of classes. Web conference and chat classes are the examples of synchronous learning.

In the case of asynchronous learning of foreign languages all the participants get access to training materials according to their individual schedules. Students do not have to attend classes at the same time. Web-classes and web-quests are the examples of this form of distance learning [7, p. 139].

Due to development of innovative technologies, distance learning of foreign languages is becoming more and more popular. It suits the students of any age, level of education and employment. As any other type of education, it has its advantages and disadvantages.

There are some advantages of distance learning.

- The opportunity to study at any time. The student makes his individual schedule of study, and decides himself when to study the material and how long time to spend.

- The opportunity for the student to study at his own pace. Students are not worried about keeping pace with others. They can return to studying difficult questions, they can watch the video or listen to the recording for several times, read the lecturers instructions or messages once more or skip the material which has been learnt before.

- The opportunity to study at any place. Students can study without leaving their homes or offices, staying at any place in the world. Everything they need is just a computer and Internet connection. It's a great advantage for disabled people, for those living in some remote places, or for people having small children.

- In-service training. Students have an opportunity to study at several higher educational establishments simultaneously, or they can work and get another higher education at the same time.

- High results of education. According to American scientists' research, the results of distance education are better than those of traditional forms of education. Distance learning presupposes that most part of the material is learnt by the student independently. It improves memorization and understanding of the information studied. The opportunity of applying knowledge in practice in their work, helps the students to consolidate skills. Using innovative technologies in the process of study makes this process more effective and interesting.

- Mobility. Sometimes it's faster and more effective to contact the lecturer or tutor by means of e-mail than set up a meeting with him or her.

- Availability of training materials. All the materials are available for the students on university web sites or are received in e-mails.

- Distance learning is cheaper than the traditional one, as students do not have to pay for hostels and transport tickets, and sometimes even for visas and foreign passport.

- Distance learning is comfortable and less stressful. Module control is held in the form of on-line testing, that's why the students feel more comfortable and are not so worried.

- Differentiated approach. Traditional forms of education do not allow the lecturer to pay much attention to each student and adapt to each student's pace of work. Distance learning give more opportunities for differentiated approach.

There are also some disadvantages of distance learning.

- It's necessary to be highly motivated, as most part of training materials should be learnt by the student independently. It requires responsibility and self-control.

- Lack of communication. Distance learning presupposes minimum of personal communication between students, and students and lecturers. In the case of foreign languages study it's a great problem,

as oral communication is one of the basic components of mastering a language. It also prevents developing team work skills.

- Problem of user's identification. It's almost impossible to control if students do all the tasks and tests on their own.

- Lack of computer skills. Unfortunately, not all the students can use all necessary software and have access to high-quality Internet connection.

There's also one more aspect that should be taken into account. It's organizing the effective system of monitoring and assessing students' knowledge. Its effectiveness and proper organization influence the planned goals achievement in teaching students, it helps lecturers to get feedback, i.e. to see the results of their work. It also shows the efficiency of teaching methods, correct or adjust the further distance learning process at higher educational establishment.

Various types of knowledge control should substitute the lack of oral communication which is of great importance in traditional study and is almost absent in distance learning. Traditional forms of oral frontal or individual survey of students are replaced by various forms of written control in distance learning.

Modern electronic monitoring systems, which are applied nowadays have the following capacities: using different types of test questions, such as multiple choice; adaptive choice of the following question depending on the previous answers; the opportunity to create various tasks with one set of questions; the opportunity to add graphical images and hyperlinks to the question.

It's very important that all the students tested are on equal terms. The ongoing monitoring functions as a communication tool between students and lecturers in distance learning. Systematic monitoring of students' knowledge helps to identify knowledge and skills gaps and systematize the information studied. Monitoring conducted by lecturers and self-control let all the students to see the results of their educational activities and address the shortcomings. It's obvious, that the process of study is not effective without the monitoring of students' knowledge.

There are some requirements to monitoring students' knowledge and skills in distance learning. They are:

- regularity;
- diversity of forms and methods;
- objectivity;
- differentiated approach;
- unified standards of all lecturers' requirements;
- the scope of information checked, should not be too large;
- positive emotional climate;
- unacceptability of negative moral assessment.

In distance learning, there's one more important requirement to students' knowledge monitoring. It's responsiveness. It means that lecturers should

check and assess students' work very fast, without any delays. They should not only put a mark, but necessarily explain or comment on students' marks.

There's one more issue that should be considered. It's what exactly should be controlled. First of all, it's necessary to monitor student's activity, i.e. how many classes or lectures he attended, how many tasks were completed and tests passed. Secondly, it's necessary to monitor student's competency, as of great importance is student's understanding the material studied and his or her ability to apply it, but not only attending classes.

It's very difficult to imitate verbal communication by means of software, though it includes the introduction of training material, modelling the situations of real communication, arranging game-playing exercises, knowledge assessment and control. One of the most difficult issues in distant education is discernment and analysis of a verbal answer of a student tested. There are some methods of such analysis: comparing with alphanumeric standard, using the banks of correct answers, method of modelling mistakes, grammar analysis, semantic analysis.

**Conclusions.** Distance learning is based, first of all, on the principles of students' independent study. This form of education gives an opportunity for students to maintain the dialogue by means of telecommunication technologies, but they are separated from lecturers in distance and time. The process of distance learning consists of consistently alternating stages of contact and non-contact activities. The duration of such stages varies and sometimes contact activities may be absent. The main task of distance learning system promotion is to provide everybody with equal opportunities to get education, and also to improve the quality of education by means of extensive use of research and educational potential of higher educational establishments. Distance learning is to give an opportunity to each student to get both basic and additional education in-services.

Distance learning of foreign languages presupposes learning great amounts of information by students outside the classrooms. It can be also considered as the beginning of life-long professional study. Various test methods and tasks enable students to carry out self-monitoring by means of modern information and communication technologies. It can be concluded that one of the main goals of higher education in Ukraine is to transform the student into an active subject of the process of study. It should be mentioned that a student must be ready to schedule his or her own educational activity, to be able to find the necessary information, to conduct research.

Summarizing all the above mentioned points, it's possible to make a conclusion, that global changes taking place in social and economic life of our society

require new approaches to the process of study. Distance learning can become a great alternative to traditional forms of education.

Methodologists in foreign languages teaching should work out the optimal forms and methods of out-of-class courses of learning foreign languages. Such courses are still to be developed or improved as the existing ones are not perfect. Multimedia technologies have positive effect on the process of study, as they motivate the students to learn more and to search for information, students are not so worried of making mistakes. There are so many sources of information in the modern world, such as web sites, electronic encyclopedias and dictionaries, videoconferences, forums, podcasts, etc. Internet resources contain audio and video materials on various topics, though access to these resources does not guarantee quick mastering of foreign languages.

In conclusion, it's necessary to point out, that application of distance learning technologies create favorable conditions for education content differentiation, and creating individual curriculums responding to rapidly changing labor market. Though distance learning technologies are not perfect and still need developing in Ukraine, they are sure to become the technologies of the future.

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