

DISTANCE LEARNING OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

APRENDIZAGEM A DISTÂNCIA DE UMA LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE TÉCNICA

ENSEÑANZA A DISTANCIA DE UN IDIOMA EXTRANJERO EN UNA UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses educational systems, forms, methods and means of distance learning of a foreign language. The purpose of our study was to analyze the attitude towards distance learning a foreign language at the Moscow Aviation Institute (Moscow, Russia). Students of 2-3 courses of took part in the survey. The results obtained after the survey and this methodology allow us to conclude that, in general, students of 2-3 courses consider distance learning of a foreign language effective. Students are open to publicly available electronic teaching aids; show the advantages of recorded distance learning in the "LMS Moodle" system, the availability and technology of training. The practical application also shows the possibilities of developing and applying electronic courses for students of technical universities.

KEYWORDS: Learning. Competencies. Innovative. Technologies. e-Course. University.

RESUMO: O artigo discute sistemas educacionais, formas, métodos e meios de ensino a distância de uma língua estrangeira. O objetivo do nosso estudo foi analisar a atitude em relação ao ensino a distância de uma língua estrangeira no Instituto de Aviação de Moscou (Moscou, Rússia). Participaram da pesquisa alunos de 2 a 3 cursos. Os resultados obtidos após a pesquisa e esta metodologia permitem concluir que, em geral, os alunos de 2 a 3 cursos consideram o ensino a distância de uma língua estrangeira eficaz. Os alunos estão abertos a auxílios didáticos eletrônicos disponíveis ao público; mostrar as vantagens do ensino a distância registrado no sistema "LMS Moodle", a disponibilidade e tecnologia do treinamento. A aplicação prática também mostra as possibilidades de desenvolvimento e aplicação de cursos eletrônicos para alunos de universidades técnicas.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Aprendizagem. Competências. Inovação. Tecnologias. e-Curso. Universidade.*

RESUMEN: *El artículo analiza los sistemas educativos, formas, métodos y medios de enseñanza a distancia de una lengua extranjera. El propósito de nuestro estudio fue analizar la actitud hacia el aprendizaje a distancia de un idioma extranjero en el Instituto de Aviación de Moscú (Moscú, Rusia). Estudiantes de 2-3 cursos de participaron en la encuesta. Los resultados obtenidos tras la encuesta y esta metodología nos permiten concluir que, en general, los estudiantes de 2-3 cursos consideran eficaz el aprendizaje a distancia de una lengua extranjera. Los estudiantes están abiertos a las ayudas de enseñanza electrónicas disponibles públicamente; mostrar las ventajas de la educación a distancia grabada en el sistema "LMS Moodle", la disponibilidad y tecnología de la capacitación. La aplicación práctica también muestra las posibilidades de desarrollar y aplicar cursos electrónicos para estudiantes de universidades técnicas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Aprendizaje. Competências. Inovador. Tecnologias. e-Curso. Universidad.*

Introduction

The development of information technologies and their dissemination contribute to a change in the methods of organizing the educational process, distance learning. Previously, the communicative goals of teaching a foreign language were achieved through face-to-face interaction between the teacher and the student. At present, for students of technical universities, distance learning a foreign language is an innovative area that requires practice-oriented activities, the use of Internet technologies. Increasing the interest in teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments appears to be particularly relevant, which is associated with the increasing role of a foreign language in the daily life of a modern student and its influence on a graduate's further professional activity. Foreign language is a foundation for qualitative cross-cultural communication and allows to develop communicative competence of the students actively (MYRAVYOVA; ZHURBENKO; ARTYUSHINA, 2021).

XX-XXI centuries were marked by a great boost of information technologies affecting all areas of social life. Currently, there is a huge range of demands for the competencies of graduates from technical universities, which resulted in the alteration of forms of learning process organization. Distance learning becomes extremely relevant and independently valuable since it stops being just the form of part-time education. Distance learning is one of the key innovative technologies, including for universities that are not engaged in language

teaching. This is formalized in the order dated 9 January, 2014 № 2 of the Ministry of Education and Science "About using distance educational technologies", that defines terms for the realization of these programs and contains following instructions: for implementing educational programs with the use of electronic learning only, there must be created certain conditions for the functioning of IT learning environment that comprises electronic IT resources, electronic-educational resources, a set of information and telecommunication technologies, appropriate technological means, and ensures mastering educational programs in full regardless of their location (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation dated 9 January 2014 №2). Currently, distance learning is playing an essential role in contemporary education, including foreign language acquisition (LIU *et al.*, 2020). Nowadays, theoreticians and scientists of different fields are considering the issue of using computer technologies from various perspectives and areas of application (MOTORINA; CHERNIAEVA, 2020).

Literature review

With the spread of COVID-19 worldwide, the problems of presence, availability, and efficiency of higher education in different countries give cause for concern (KURBAKOVA; VOLKOVA; KURBAKOV, 2020). Because of this epidemiological situation and the transition of Russian universities to distance, learning appears more and more researches that are related to distance learning. Among them, practical solutions for the courses of a foreign language implemented with the use of tools of distance learning are researched (KRYANEV; PAVLOVA; KVON, 2021). Russian (A. Kuleshov) and foreign scientists (J. Rokholl, V. Shou, G.-F. Manzony, E. Rismagambetov) express the view about the necessity of integrating educational online and offline technologies for maximum educational effect (USACHEVA; CHERNYAKOV, 2020).

The specific nature of distance learning is its indirectness, teaching, and acquisition of the information conducted with the aid of technical communication as a prelude for intensification of independent work of students (KABAKOV; SOROKIN; RYAPUKHIN, 2021; INIESTA; CAMPILLO, 2021). Such a type of learning intensifies the mental activity of students and allows them to make their own arrangements for the activity within the educational process (TARABRINA; WILCZEWSKI, 2021; UKHOV; DMITROCHENKO; RYAPUKHIN, 2021). For students of Technical universities, remote learning of a foreign language is an innovative field since it requires practice-oriented activity. Foreign languages

are relevant for studying at universities and a subject of interest for developers of multimedia programs. The system of teaching foreign languages in distance learning is prospective for creating plenty of new programs for teaching a foreign language (BEKHTEREV; LOGINOVA, 2013).

One of the versatile competencies, which each Technical university graduate should have, is the ability to carry out business communication in a foreign language in speaking and writing. To master such competency, the practice of teaching foreign languages stipulates the using methodology of communicative system-active approach, which allows solving learning objectives. Modeling various situations allows a learner to find a solution and study a language during communication.

Previously communicative goals of learning a foreign language were achieved within constant face-to-face interaction between participants of the educational process. At present, the preferred form of learning in remote education is the internet technologies that form a special way of presenting the learning material and set the radically different boundaries of interaction between a teacher and a student. Thus, "in online mode a teacher can organize online essays, quizzes, and exhibitions" (USMANOVA, 2021). Education at the university implies a high share of autonomy, self-organization, and the ability to use computer technologies, which prepares the fertile ground for distance learning. Distance learning is also called "flexible learning", and "electronic learning" since it ensures the transfer of information across the distance; storing, editing, and processing the information; access to and ability to work with multiple information sources with the help of multimedia systems (POLAT, 2004).

Distance learning implies using educational programs and electronic books that allow planning and controlling knowledge comprehension by students. Students of the technical university work with the books individually having the opportunity to rank the task performance, and get back to the most difficult tasks. The benefit of an electronic book is the compliance with the requirements of a personal-oriented approach in the methodology of teaching a foreign language, which is particularly important for the technical university (SOLOVOV, 2006). At the same time, the electronic book complies with the traditional didactic principles: scientific, visualization, availability, regularity, the solidity of the assimilation, activity, etc. The e-book performs several functions: educational, controlling, transforming, consolidating, etc. (MASHBITS, 1986).

The e-book is interrelated with a computer (KRIVOVA *et al.*, 2021). Because of it, the presence of the computer is an indispensable condition that helps to optimize the process of learning a foreign language while checking the tasks, monitoring activities. Owing to

innovative technologies, teachers and students of the technical university can communicate actively within student-centered learning. Additionally, the e-book is to a high degree oriented to obtaining instant feedback, which has a positive effect on the students' motivation with the various means, readiness to work in an interactive mode, and allows controlling the level of students training (MOORE; GREG, 2005). The electronic book in remote learning allows indicating the level of students' knowledge through the tests detecting professional competency.

Testing held with the aid of computer technology tools gives the opportunity to get confidential results, therefore contributes to the retention of self-esteem. According to the opinion of I.E. Korotayeva, O.V. Chuksina, "the format of distance learning creates the platform for the development of leadership skills". Also, researchers note that the quality of language learning is higher if there is a correlation between the requirements of the program and the basic English level (KOROTAEVA; CHUKSINA, 2020). The correlation contributes to a positive impact on the development of learning skills.

Students of technical universities do the test, which purpose is training, in comfortable conditions allowing them to concentrate on the task. It is important that distance testing excludes the impact of negative factors: "negative emotions because of the comments from a teacher or the fellow students, there is no fear of making a mistake in the test offered" (ZIMNYAYA, 1989), etc. Functions of the control, which allow to identify the level of students' comprehension, personalize educational process, consolidate the knowledge, diagnose the week points in learning, develop an interest towards learning a foreign language, motivate students to continue studying, correct the obtained results play a particular role in learning a foreign language (KOLESNIKOVA; DOLGINA, 2001).

At present, there are specific programs of distance education that enable learning foreign languages remotely (WHITE, 1982). They can be divided into three groups: programs that are devoted to studying different types of speech production; programs aimed at learning sections of the language system; programs devoted to identifying the skill levels. Computer programs are the means for introduction learning material, modeling communicative situations, organizing learning tasks, controlling the obtained results (ZIMNYAYA, 2004). Multi-media immersion systems that allow synthesizing the text, sounds, and video images for using various options of visualization are actively applied with the purpose of the improvement of the distance learning programs (NEDOSUGOVA *et al.*, 2021).

To date, some dedicated systems enable to implement the distance learning effectively (KOROTAEVA; KAPUSTINA, 2021). One of them is the system called "LMS Moodle",

developed for organizing the distance learning of a foreign language and testing the relevant knowledge. The name Moodle is made of the initials of the system Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. At the Moscow Aviation Institute (National Research University), the system is chosen as a core educational technology, the features of which are represented in this article. Distance learning in MAI conducts on the educational platform <https://lms.mai.ru/> (DENISOVA *et al.*, 2021; UKHOV *et al.*, 2019).

This system gives access to various learning courses, enabling to complement and fill them up with different types of information, such as texts or videos. After completing the course, a student passes the final test, which is based on the requirements of the curriculum in the subject "Foreign Language". Due to the results of the test, the system draws up a report; thereby the time spent on checking the materials by the teacher reduces. Thus, "LMS Moodle" is a versatile tool for teaching students of different English language proficiency.

"LMS Moodle" enables to develop the communication between the students and the teachers within learning a foreign language, exchange the materials via the system, and participate in interactive learning. The time spent on the system is displayed which allows controlling attendance of the students and the quality of the tasks that they complete. For every member of the course stipulated making a profile, opportunity to save and analyze the obtained grades. Such a system is efficient and for teachers, since they can choose the assessment system, create texts, save the results, leave comments on the tasks, which students can see (GURA, 2006). Distance learning a foreign language can be divided into two components: oral and written. Instead of traditional solving typical tasks with the aid of distance learning, it is possible to apply the new forms of lessons: projects, modeling, etc. One complex task can be divided into several parts in a manner that students fulfill them being in groups for obtaining the final result (KARAMYSHEVA, 2001).

The key aspect of the process of learning a foreign language at the technical university is the reproducing of a verbal dialogue between a learner and a teacher. Listening comprehension is one of the most challenging language skills (VARENINA *et al.*, 2021). For doing that, teachers of a faculty of Foreign Language for Aerospace Specialties apply videoconferences via Moodle/lms.mai.ru, Zoom, Microsoft teams, and so on. This made it possible to maintain personal connection during distance learning, to assess knowledge of the students (listening comprehension), to solve their issues regarding the learning material, etc. (SOKOLOVA *et al.*, 2021; KARTUSHINA, 2021).

In addition, in 2021, under the given circumstances, a faculty of Foreign Language for Aerospace Specialties undertook a scientifically practical conference remotely. Such a

conference has a positive impact on the process of teaching and learning foreign languages at the technical universities (ABRAMOVA; KOROTAEVA, 2019).

Materials of the research

Despite the fact that many researchers investigated the essence of distance learning and the nature of independent work, the specificity of distance learning of foreign language by students of technical universities has not been entirely discovered. Ananiev determines empirical methods of the research, among which are psycho-diagnostic methods, namely questionnaires which have resulted in the necessity to undertake a study among students from 2-3 grades, and the analysis of the efficiency and their attitude towards this format of the educational process. The authorial questionnaire was used for the research. Full-time students from 2-3 grades (214 people in total) took part in the research. The sampling was evenly distributed. For identifying the results of the research, the descriptive statistics method (the arithmetic average standard deviation) was used.

Questions in the survey were intended to estimate the experience of using the "LMS Moodle" system in the process of teaching a foreign language to the students of MAI.

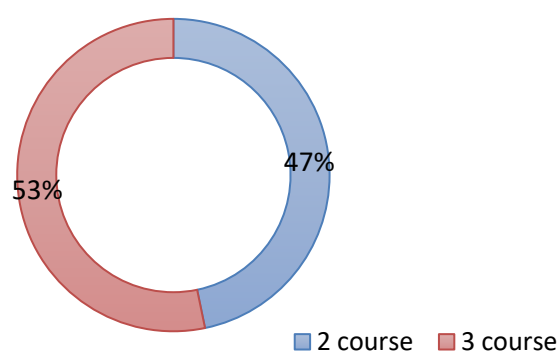
The main part of the questionnaire form was comprised of seven open and closed-ended questions aimed at obtaining research information with multiple-choice options in which a respondent had to choose only the correct one:

1. Is it convenient for you to learn a foreign language remotely?
2. What advantages of the "LMS Moodle" system can you note?
3. Is your level of motivation for learning within the bounds of distance form?
4. Doing the foreign language homework on the "LMS Moodle" system became...
5. Is your performance in a foreign language during the period of distance learning became better?
6. Which skill of speaking activity is the most difficult to develop with the aid of the "LMS Moodle" system?
7. Is the assessment with the help of the system of distance learning "LMS Moodle" objective?

Results of the research

While processing the results of the questionnaire survey respondents, were divided into two groups due to their courses. Within each course, answers were almost the same, pic. 1. It must be noted that the picture shows average values for all the samples. Individual results show widely diverging responses.

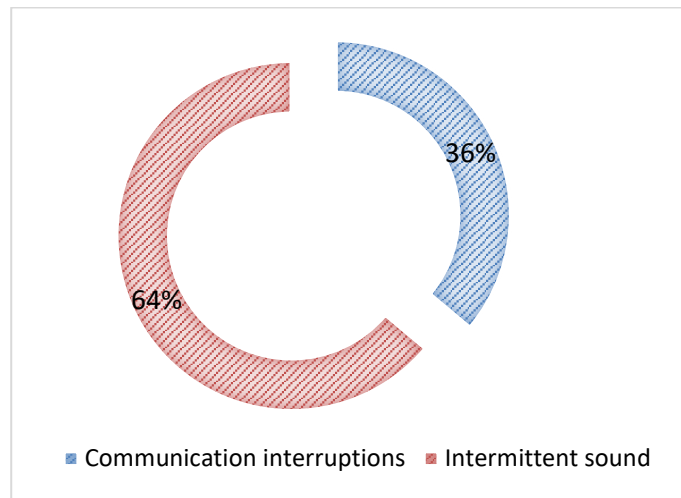
Figure 1 – An idea of the effectiveness of distance learning of foreign a language by students of 2-3 courses



Source: Prepared by the authors

Students who learn in the second course noted an increase in motivation (57%). Most of them, 45%, relate this fact with getting speedy results and feedback in "LMS Moodle" since the system assesses the work instantly. 62% of the research participants pointed out that the "LMS Moodle" system estimates the results objectively and unbiased, the factor of subjective evaluation is excluded. Among the advantages of distance learning, 89% of respondents indicate the constant presence of the teacher in the system, the opportunity to send questions to the teacher and get a system grade, availability of the teacher who is often in touch. 11% of the students taking part in the research single out the increase in cognitive activity. Respondents note that in using the "LMS Moodle" system several difficulties have been encountered: the poor quality of the audio (64%), interruptions in connection (36%), which affects the quality of learning since the high quality of the audio is essential for having conversations in a foreign language.

Figure 2 – Difficulties in using the "LMS Moodle" system



Source: Prepared by the authors

87% of respondents of third courses have noted the increase of the motivation, 57% of respondents relate this fact with speedy feedback in distance learning. 71% of students who took part in the research have noted that assessment in the "LMS Moodle" system is effective. 84% of respondents consider technological effectiveness and availability, allowing to send messages to the teacher in real-time and get a system grade, as the advantages of distance learning. 34% of respondents noted the poor quality of the audio in using "LMS Moodle"; 20% of respondents – interruptions in connection that affected the quality of learning in performing verbal tasks.

Conclusion

Thus, the novelty lies in the research of attitude towards the distance learning of 2-3 year students of technical universities for the course on foreign language. Data of psychodiagnostic method (questionnaire) point to change of attitude towards distance learning. The questionnaire analysis of 2-3 grade students of technical universities demonstrates that learners are open to new and more effective forms of learning aimed at developing cognitive activity; widen their exposure, and improving communicative skills. In this, 47% of respondents of the second year and 53% of studied students of the third year consider distance foreign language learning effective in the current context. Students are open to using publicly available electronic books. They note the benefits of the ability to record online lessons on "LMS Moodle" and Zoom, which allows replaying them whenever it is necessary in case if there is a need to recall, clarify or refresh covered material; ability to develop authorial

programs for foreign language learning: availability and technological effectiveness of learning. During online classes, cognitive and educational, communicative, sociocultural (communication with the culture of a country where the language, students learn, is spoken), and professional competencies gradually take shape. It should be noted that attention towards distance learning of a foreign language in technical universities increases, which requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach.

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