DISTANCE TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

Today, influenced by development of global net and scientific-and-technological advance, pedagogy, as well as any other sciences, is changing being strongly drawn towards information-and-communication technologies as highly prospective modern teaching aids. The article is to analyze in what way the ICT development modifies the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching under the present-day conditions. The full text of presentation will be illustrated with short videos with resource materials worked out by the authors especially for ESP distance course.

The authors come to the conclusion that teachers' tasks at present are to intensify the process of mastering the foreign language through the application of state-of-the-art technologies, to facilitate each student's activity in the process of learning and provide opportunities for their academic independence and creativity. The use of modern teaching aids such as computer programs and Internet technologies as well as distance learning render aid in solving these tasks.

Keywords: Distance teaching, ESP, open education system.

INTRODUCTION

Today, influenced by development of global net and scientific-and-technological advance, pedagogy, as well as any other sciences, is changing being strongly drawn towards information-and-communicative technologies as highly prospective modern teaching aids.

Within information society, foreign language teachers obtain new effective teaching aids. Implementation of information and communication technologies (ICT) in educational process in general and network resources in particular leads to expanding access to education, developing open education systems and creating new qualification characteristics of modern specialists.

Specific conditions of ESP teaching are characterised by a comparatively small number of academic hours, a minimal training period (a two-year cycle) and different levels of applicants' initial language training. Therefore, it is reasonable to intensify training by devoting more academic hours to extracurricular classes and stimulating students' independent work, i.e. making an emphasis on a distance mode of teaching.

OPEN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Distance learning is a set of network, programme, information and pedagogical technologies of purposefully organised learning process, by means of students' and teachers' synchronous or non-synchronous interactive team work and work with teaching aids invariant to their location in space and agreed in time [1].

The open education system assumes getting education through a student's purposeful, controlled, intensive independent creative work at a convenient tempo. A student is free to choose the curriculum, teachers, schedule and form of study in one or several educational institutions (regardless of their locations or the student's place of residence) and an opportunity of his/her lifelong study following his/her own educational path.

At present many students prefer electronic resources to traditional information sources as they consider Internet search to be an easier way to master a language.

Admittedly, the main objective of teaching foreign language at higher education institutions is practical use of foreign language as well as developing a personality capable of communication and aiming at

self-education. Participation in various international programmes and an opportunity to study abroad assume not only a high level of foreign language knowledge but also an individual's particular features: sociability, absence of language barrier, knowledge of international etiquette norms, broad outlook. The teacher's tasks are to facilitate each student's activity in the process of learning and provide situations for their creative activity. The use of modern teaching aids such as computer programmes and Internet technologies as well as distance learning render aid in solving these tasks.

INTERNET POSSIBILITIES

The Internet provides a wide range of information opportunities. But whatever characteristics information-and-subject environment may have, it is linguo-didactic tasks and peculiarities of students' cognitive activity determined by particular goals of education that will be brought to the forefront. Therefore, distance learning in view of Internet resources is a fundamental means of realising these tasks. At present, such form of education is most popular with working students.

However, fast development of information-and-subject environments in different languages may be observed on the Internet. A trained specialist who is expected to find his/her niche within rapidly developing technologies of developed countries should be well-informed in his area. Modern means of connecting with partners, access to the Internet information resources assume proficient command of not only computer technologies but also foreign languages.

It is no coincidence that UNESCO announced our century to be the age of polyglots. The primary value at the age of informatisation is information. The specific feature of the subject "Foreign Language" is that the fundamental component of foreign language learning content is not scientific basis but work methods – teaching various speech activity types: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Therefore, in order to teach students different types of speech activity, one should provide each student with an ability to practise the speech activity type he/she is mastering at the moment.

Teaching speech activity is possible only in live communication. Thus, a partner is needed. In the process of computer telecommunications, the student can have a live conversation (oral or written) with the teacher or a group mate.

Basing on the subject specifics, knowing linguo-didactic features and functions of distance courses as well as their opportunities and resources, we may determine the types of goals which may be achieved by applying particular tasks. Only then one can select methods of their application to distance learning.

Widespread occurrence of distance learning system is explained by its ability to solve a range of tasks society is faced with. Such form of education as distance learning contributes to raising society's standard of scholarship, realisation of its wide cross-sections' needs for educational services regardless of a particular individual's place of residence, raising qualification of high school teaching staff and making world community's information space more available.

Foreign experience of teaching with the use of new information technologies is considerably greater than the Russian one though in international foreign language teaching practice this form of learning came into realisation not long ago, but it quickly became popular and proved to be an effective tool in education. During the last 15 years methodologists' attention has been shifting from the use of educational computer programmes to network resources. It is worth pointing out that a range of educational computer programmes and training devices for distance learning already exists and is widely used. As for opportunities of network resources exploitation, in particular on-line courses and educational portals in terms of teaching non-linguistic students, they are still subjected to further research due to their comparatively recent appearance.

As ESP teaching is based on the competence approach, it assumes that a student does not acquire separate knowledge and skills but gets them as a complex.

An intending specialist's foreign professional communicative competence under modern conditions must be developed regarding to the IT component.

Theoretical issues related to electronic linguo-didactics have been studied by scientists having psycho-pedagogical (A.G. Mordvinova, A.S. Akopova), methodological (E. L. Nosenko, M.M. Kenning and others) and information-and-technological (E.S. Polat, A.M. Dovgyallo, M. Khazen, N.M. Mekeko and others) viewpoints [2].

Having studied the problem of interactive technologies application in foreign language teaching, one may point out that linguistic community with the potential of ICT in mind is actively developing ways of enhancing effectiveness of teaching foreign language to non-linguistic students.

We have conducted monitoring of existing Internet resources aimed at teaching a profession-oriented foreign language, which enabled us to single out the following types of network education-and-methodological resources:

1.   Portals of particular educational institutions' internal networks offering material only for students of specific educational institutions.

2.   Foreign websites teaching professional language which generally include such speech activity types as reading and listening and leave speaking, writing and profession-oriented translation out of attention.

These network resources have several considerable disadvantages: absence of tasks aimed at developing students' set of competences and lack of teacher-student interaction as types of the suggested tasks assume only automatic check of their correct fulfillment. Thus, today like never before the problem of developing ESP distance courses capable of eliminating all the above-listed drawbacks is topical for non-linguistic higher education institutions.

The use of information technologies in education should meet the following principles: correspondence of the aim of IT use to teaching purposes, complexity and systemacy, communicativeness and the situational factor, relevance and cognitive direction, adequacy, the use of computer aids as a learning tool, raising the level of difficulty, integrity of all learning activity forms.

Distance foreign language teaching is an essential component of the developing open education system. ICT implementation in educational process in general and in the process of distance foreign language teaching in particular allows realising the concept of Life Long Learning.

The system of continuing education is oriented to a personality's lifelong development, enhancing opportunities of his/her labour and social adaptation in the rapidly changing world; it aims at developing students' abilities, their aspirations, opportunities and versatile self-development.

According to the State Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education, a graduate must be able both to continue education and to perform professional activity in foreign environment.

For a long time scientists tried to find effective ways of distance learning. Apart from traditional printed aids, there appeared the use of telecommunication systems. Indeed, if a student can not count on constant feedback from a qualified teacher there will be no learning in spite of educational process organisers' efforts to make the process motivating and communicative, i.e. the success of any kind of distance learning depends on effective teacher-student interaction.

The World Bank, having analysed the problem of distance education, came to the conclusion that on average 40 % of students who turned to distance learning with traditional methods usually did not complete their course of study because of isolation due to lack of interaction both with peers and with the teacher. Further study of distance telecommunication courses showed decrease of this tendency and a higher percentage of students who completed their studies with the use of ICT.

Unique didactic facilities of the Internet allow its effective use in distance learning. Having realised educational opportunities of global information systems, many countries are financing such projects. Obtaining higher education at university through the Internet is not considered to be something new in modern information-oriented society because the Internet enables students to use the resources of hyper computers, largest libraries and professional data bases. The Internet, just like any other modern information system, should be viewed as a powerful teaching means which corresponds to the objectives and demands of modern pedagogical technologies such as constructivism, active learning, cooperative learning, etc.

There are several options of the use of distance courses based on new information technologies:

•   classroom use of the distance course;

•   the use of the distance course for students from various universities supervised by the course curator;

•   organising a permanent group of cyber class students whose progress is closely controlled by the course supervisor;

•   the use of the distance course for students of various universities without the curator's supervision, i.e. self education. The basic feature of distance learning is emphasis on students' independent work.

Internet distance courses are instructions of task fulfillment demanding thorough study and strict adherence from students.

Another feature of organising distance learning in a cyber-class is the fact that each student's as well as the teacher's residence is not important. Each student can access the server at any time convenient for him/her in accordance with the course curriculum.

An important characteristic of distance course education is a high interactivity level provided by the Internet.

Secondly, in order to find information on the Internet one should be able to correctly formulate the request in foreign language which develops internal need to use foreign language as a communication means.

Another characteristic is multimedia potential of new information technologies in general.

In the course of research of teaching various speech activity types with the use of educational telecommunication projects, it is teaching different types of reading that has been placed in the forefront among all the aspects. Therefore, the teacher is faced with the task to develop skimming and scanning skills. Thus, one of the basic features of foreign language distance courses may be considered the focus on teaching different types of reading.

All things considered, the main features of teaching process organisation in the system of distance education are as follows:

•   independent work;

•   computer literacy;

•   an opportunity to appear under an alias;

•   high interactivity level provided by Internet opportunities;

•   multimedia potential of new information technologies in general.

Apart from the above listed features, there are some specific characteristics of foreign language teaching:

•   teaching various types of reading in consideration of multimedia opportunities of modern information systems;

•   availability of foreign (mostly English speaking) environment in WAN;

•   without systematic feedback with a qualified teacher such courses, as a rule, are doomed despite various attempts to introduce communicative and entertaining elements.

In recent years, universities worldwide have been paying more attention to the opportunity to use computer telecommunication technologies for distance education.

Such education provides the following processes:

- prompt information transfer and storage;

- interactive teaching with the use of specially developed methods and technologies;

- prompt feedback with the teacher and group mates;

- access to various information sources through the Internet;

The level of effectiveness provided by any distance education type depends on the following factors:

- effective interaction between the teacher and students;

- educational technologies used;

- effectiveness of the developed methodological materials and means of their delivery;

- feedback effectiveness.

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Effective distance learning depends on the organisation of distance education process, methodological quality of teaching materials and professional skills of teachers working with particular programmes. It is also important for the student to be able to rely on highly effective feedback and be sure of correctness of his/her actions. The feedback should be prompt in the form of external assessment.

The profession-oriented approach to teaching foreign language to non-linguistic students consists in developing students' ability of foreign communication in professional, business, scientific spheres on the basis of professional thinking. In comparison with previous years, there is constant growth of the need for developing the linguistic component of higher education within globalisation on the basis of oral and written communication and linguo-cultural aspects. Therefore, the need for foreign languages appears in the process of using computer and information technologies for processing large data flows and in connection with developing international relations in the sphere of specialists' professional activity.

Specialists' foreign professional communication is a constantly developing category in continuous evolution. The content of profession-oriented teaching must be corrected on the basis of society's new social requirement while taking into account specific socio-psychological conditions.

Special attention should be paid to the practice of holding a scientific discussion and acquiring skills of writing and presenting reports on various professional topics which facilitates developing students' inclination to independent search of language material and carrying out independent research on the basis of earlier acquired reading and listening skills.

The final purpose of teaching foreign language to non-linguistic students is development of communicative competence, an ability to solve extra-linguistic tasks in the process of verbal communication. This process represents a special form of social interaction performed in the course of communicants' speech activity.

Computer telecommunications provide effective feedback which assumes both organisation of methodological resources and communication with the teacher and course-mates. As a rule, learning process within distance education is carried out so as to enable teachers to check tasks, control and assess them.

The main role in distance learning must be played by various types of independent work with consideration for the methodological and content components.

CONCLUSIONS

Having studied the problem of using interactive technologies in foreign language teaching, we have come to the conclusion that linguistic community with the potential of ICT in mind is actively developing ways of enhancing effectiveness of teaching foreign language to non-linguistic students. As seen from experience, the use of ICT in foreign language teaching raises the quality and level of intending specialists' training.

Distance foreign language learning is an essential component of developing open education systems based on information technologies. The success of any kind of distance learning depends on effective teacher-student interaction.

At present, the profession-oriented approach to teaching foreign language to non-linguistic students is connected with developing students' ability of foreign communication in professional, business and scientific spheres on the basis of professional thinking.

Various forms of distance telecommunications have their characteristics determined by learning process. In its turn, the use of new educational technologies requires new information-and-communicative aids. Such information-and-technological facilities assume foreign language teachers' close cooperation with IT specialists.

Foreign language teachers of non-linguistic higher education institutions are faced with a serious task – to teach students to get and process information using foreign language as a tool of communication and learning.

A variety of foreign language teaching aids and ways sets new requirements for professional training of foreign language teachers who are to act according to the necessity to choose among possible methodological systems the one which corresponds to the learning conditions most.

Foreign language teachers, even those without special training in the sphere of information technologies, are now confident users of computer and network technologies in the course of their preparation for classes. Computer software is constantly improved being made more user-friendly and available to a wide range of users. Therefore, the main trend to be followed should be directed towards mastering innovation pedagogical technologies rather than towards improving the information-technological component as such.

The modern stage of Russian society development is characterised by substantial economic and social transformations based, among other reasons, on the wide use of the achievements of scientific-and-technological advance, in particular, computer and information technologies. Under these circumstances, one can observe qualitative improvement of specialists' training system in higher education institutions.

This comparatively new form of education has proved to be effective in teaching various subjects. However, in practical foreign language teaching it has not been so widely used as in other areas [2], [3]. Linguistic faculties preferred to limit themselves to part time (evening) departments because teaching practical use of foreign language by means of occasional meetings with the teacher is a hard and practically hopeless job. Nevertheless, distance learning may be extremely effective in training foreign language specialists [4], [5].

Under distance learning we assume a system of interrelated means, organisational forms and methodological ways of interaction between subjects of educational process based on a specific educational-and-methodological complex and providing for increase of students' independent work.

Distance learning programs are based on principal textbooks containing fundamental educational information. At the same time, these textbooks do not have to be distance learning-oriented but they should contain fundamental information and provide fundamental knowledge. In addition to these textbook, there are profession-oriented methodological materials for the corresponding courses, audio and video materials, CDs and finally opportunities to use computer telecommunication technologies such as e-mail, voice mail, e-conferences, electronic information board, programme systems on the Internet, etc.

Each form of distance telecommunications has its specifics and determines special features of educational process. On the other hand, the necessity of using particular educational technologies requires search for the corresponding telecommunication means and information technologies. Thus, for instance, the teacher's interaction with the student is not characterised by high intensity and frequency during the latter's individual work. Therefore, such classes and consultations may well enough be provided by e-mail communication. Information support of foreign language distance learning is not only crucial but also the most complicated factor. Consequently, it requires most attention from the organisational and methodological points of view.

For group distance classes, where both quantity and quality of educational interaction determine the effectiveness of the whole learning process, specialists admit the teleconference mode to be most acceptable and effective [6]. The process of working at correction of pronunciation skills, enriching students' vocabulary, consolidation of grammar knowledge requires reiteration and may be provided by various programmes on CDs. It should be noted that informational support of distance foreign language learning is not only the key factor but also the most problematic and less developed both from the organisational and from the methodological points of view [7].

This attempt to analyse the concept of distance learning, its most typical peculiarities and opportunities of their practical realisation may promote further research and development of new forms, means and methods of distance learning in the course of training foreign language specialists.

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Resources for teaching English for Specific Purposes. OneStopEnglish has a comprehensive section dedicated to teaching ESP. There are lesson plans related to English for Aviation, Oil, Marketing, Sales, Human Resources and many others. Teaching English for Specific Purposes can be tricky but it's totally doable. Any TEFL teacher with the correct training will be able to handle an ESP class, if that means teaching air traffic controllers from Reunion, security guards from Angola or electrical engineers from South Korea. Share on Facebook Share. English for specific purposes (ESP) is a subset of English as a second or foreign language. It usually refers to teaching the English language to university students or people already in employment, with reference to the particular vocabulary and skills they need. As with any language taught for specific purposes, a given course of ESP will focus on one occupation or profession, such as Technical English, Scientific English, English for medical professionals, English for waiters, English for tourism... An English masters program will teach you the complexities of the English language. These programs will help you become a better writer, editor or speaker in your professional and daily life. Dealing with public universities is far from an optimal option. This vastly increases the diversity in a distance learning classroom and produces challenging conversation among those from hugely divergent communities, regions, and distant cultures. Request Information Distance learning Courses in English 2021. Other options within this field of study: Online | Online Certificates | Online Summer courses.