



Distance Education in Teaching A Foreign Language (Experience of The Tyumen State Medical University)

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Available online at: www.isroset.org

Received: 10/Sept/2021, Accepted: 20/Sept/2021, Online: 30/Sept/2021

Abstract— The article describes the experience of replacing full-time classroom work with other types of contact work when teaching Russian to foreigners at the Preparatory Course of the Tyumen State Medical University. The distance format of the course includes online classes, online testing, and individual online consultations through various Internet services. The author indicates the place in the course of each type of work, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. With this distance format, there is also a place for non-electronic learning tools.

Keywords— Distance education, e-learning, online learning, Preparatory Course for Foreigners, online classes, online testing, contact work in distance learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the history of distance learning dates back many decades, the modern distance learning is very different from what it was in the 20th century. The spread of the Internet and various technical devices have made distance learning more similar to full-time face-to face learning. In recent years, this distant type of education has become increasingly popular, but this popularity often does not indicate the advantage of distance education over full-time, but reflects current trends. For example, when, under the conditions of the declared quarantine, educational organizations were forced to switch to distance learning in a short time, to give students the opportunity to receive educational services without visiting an educational institution. Thus, the development of distance learning methods has become necessary for all universities, which plan to work in the new reality, even those in which the distance format had extremely low popularity: linguistic, engineering, medical.

The purpose of this article is to summarize the practical experience of working on a Preparatory Course for Foreigners on the transition to a distance-learning format using electronic and non-electronic tools.

II. METHODOLOGY AND RELATED WORK

Until 2020, the training of groups of foreigners in Russian language at the Elementary, Basic and First certification levels at the Preparatory Course of the Tyumen State Medical University was held only in full-time format, which is still very popular among beginners to learn a foreign language. If it is possible to come to the University to study in the classroom, all students do this. However,

modern technical means and electronic educational resources allow you to work at the distance as efficiently as possible.

“Distance” is a key criterion when choosing a term that defines the form of work: distance learning. Fernando Ferri and his co-authors define “distant learning as a way of providing education without a human contact” [1]. Apparently, the authors mean human contact face to face, without the help of technical devices such as a phone or a computer.

Today, the concept of “distance learning” coexists with the terms “e-learning” and “online learning”, and sometimes they are used interchangeably [2]. Moore Joi L. talks about an experiment when “respondents were provided learning environment scenarios, and were to select the most relevant term from a list of nine choices... Approximately 57% of respondents identified this as online learning, and then 19% selected both e-Learning and online” [3]. Gary A. Berg, in the encyclopedic article Britannica, defines distance learning: “Distance learning, also called distance education, e-learning, and online learning, form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication” [4]. As we can see, Encyclopedia Britannica mixes the terms distance education, e-learning, and online learning, and recognizes the physical separation of participants in the educational process as the main factor.

However, many researchers [5, 3, 6] also point out the differences, first of all, between distance learning and e-learning (which can be both – online and offline). Thus,

Sarah Guri-Rosenblit and Begonia Gros note, “distance education, by its very definition, denotes the physical separation of the learner from the instructor” [7]. E-learning – “is a form of distance learning, combining the capabilities of computer systems, data processing and presentation techniques and the Internet as the basic plane of communication” [8]. However, you can also watch an online lecture and do online tests in the classroom. “Distance is not a defining characteristic of e-learning” [7], and the presence of a virtual learning environment is recognized as a more important fact [6], which the teacher and students can use even while they are in the same classroom.

That is, you study with books at home and come to the university once a semester – this is distance learning, but it is not e-learning. “When you watch an online lecture in class, this is e-learning, but it is not distance learning. If you are take an online course or join a webinar, this is both distance learning and e-learning” [9].

The Preparatory Course for Foreigners (PCF) of the Tyumen State Medical University trains foreigners who plan to enroll in the Russian Medical University. These students receive training in the Russian language (from the Beginning level) and in basic subjects: Chemistry, Biology and Physics.

The distance-learning format at the PCF is associated with the separation of the learner from the instructor due to closed borders and the inability of students to come to Russia. When teaching a foreign language, student-teacher communication is important, so online classes are the main part of the training. Students can take a distance course both synchronously (in real time, as online training) and asynchronously: watch online classes on the record, prepare themselves according to the materials presented, receive consultations through correspondence with the teacher, etc. – that is, independently set their own daily schedule and the pace of training.

In addition to the virtual learning environment (electronic learning tools), pre-prepared printed materials and any other auxiliary tools that are applicable at a distance and help in mastering the material are also used. These materials on paper can be used both in addition to electronic materials, and replace them if necessary (if there is an unstable Internet connection, its absence, or for any other reason that online learning is impossible).

Thus, the term “distance learning” can be applied to the course of the PCF of the Tyumen State Medical University. We can say that this distance learning is online learning and e-learning, but it should be noted that it is also possible to use non-electronic learning tools available when working at a distance.

III. RESULTS

Online classes, online testing and work with textbooks represent contact work in distance learning at the PCF of

the Tyumen State Medical University, in full-time training corresponding to classroom work.

Online classes are conducted using programs that allow you to transmit sound, video, show the screen and write messages in the chat. First, the most popular Skype and Zoom programs meet these criteria. The Mirapolis system is suitable for video lectures. Unfortunately, its use for conferences turned out to be ineffective, since when two or more people participated in the conference at the same time, unsolvable problems with sound appeared. Nowadays, there are also many programs that allow online classes.

Despite the obvious parallels between classroom lessons and video conferencing, online classes are not identical to classroom studying. Some types of work that are natural for face-to face education do not make sense at the video conference: writing, reading (working with text), self-completion of tasks in a workbook. If during the lesson in the classroom, the teacher has the opportunity to monitor the process of completing tasks (directing, prompting, answering students' questions), then at the online lesson, the teacher controls only the moment of starting work. It is impossible to track further actions of students: the teacher cannot look into the student's notebook, does not see how fast the reading of the text is progressing, etc. Besides, the reading process itself takes a lot of time, and the teacher's control at this moment is superfluous (the student is working with the text). The questions that have appeared can be asked in the chat. Therefore, it is advisable to carry out these types of work outside the video conference traffic.

The most suitable types of work during an online lesson are listening, student interviews (speaking), explaining new information and monitoring its assimilation. During online classes, students can present the results of their offline work, and the teacher can advise in the same way as he does in full-time face-to face classes.

Online tests are used both for monitoring (current, intermediate, final), and for reinforcement the information, giving each student the opportunity to practice individually, performing tasks on the Internet for as much time and as many times as necessary for effective mastering of the topic.

In addition to testing on the Internet, printed textbooks and workbooks prepared by teachers of the Pre-university Department are widely used at the PCF. Despite the fact that most of the content (theoretical and practical tasks materials) collected in the books can be offered to students in electronic form, the use of printed publications (as well as additional papers copied on the printer) is advisable, since it reduces the load on vision when working with screens of electronic devices.

The ability to write answers by hand, work with a paper version always receives a positive response from PCF

students. The results of this work can be presented both orally at an online lesson, and individually to the teacher via one of the established communication channels.

At the PCF of the Tyumen State Medical University, the main teacher-student communication channel is a messenger (WhatsApp, Viber). All students of the group, as well as all of their teachers, are united in one group in the messenger. The chat of such a group is actively used both in full-time and in distance learning. Due to the ease of the procedure for transmitting images by messenger, students prefer to use it – they take photos of the work done on paper and send it to the teacher in a personal chat. Other methods of transferring files and texts have not gained much popularity on the PCF: social networks – because of the small audience coverage and cumbersome communication system, e-mail – because of the inconvenience in sending information and sorting the received data, Skype chat – because of the perception of it as serving exclusively online classes.

IV. DISCUSSION

Contact work in online classes takes less time than other types of work, but it is the most important part of the course, because it allows students to organize their work most effectively. A questionnaire conducted during distance learning at the PCF in April 2020 showed that 100% of foreign students had no previous experience of distance learning. Moreover, despite the fact that in many countries self-study is practiced in high schools, 67% of foreign students of PCF noted that it is difficult for them to complete tasks without a teacher, so they consider online classes necessary for distance learning.

The use of video conferencing in a distance-learning course has both pros and cons. In addition to the undoubted benefits of personal contact with the teacher (via the Internet), other positive aspects of video conferences can be marked:

- the ability to attend an online lesson in situations where it is impossible to attend an in-person lesson.

While staying in the hospital or in the observatory under quarantine, students were happy to attend distance classes. Probably even with more pleasure than on normal days, since in the conditions of limited entertainment, the educational process brought variety to their lives. And in a situation of lockdown and closed borders, online classes helped progress in studies.

- the ability to view classes in the recording.

If it is impossible to attend an online lesson in person, you can watch it at a convenient time. This, of course, does not completely replace personal work in the classroom, but it allows the student to get most of the information easily that would have to be searched and restored independently if they missed a full-time lesson. In addition, when performing practical tasks on his or her own, the student

can return to the recording of the online lesson attended in order to restore or clarify the information.

Ogirima, S. A. O., a member of Computer Professionals of Nigeria, and his co-authors note, “information and communication technology tools support enhances the student’s educational experience and facilitates communication with the lecturers, other students, and with the global community” [10].

In addition to the advantages, online classes also have undoubted disadvantages that do not give video conferences a complete replacement for face-to-face classes:

- frequent lack of visual contact with students.

The vast majority prefer to communicate without video. This has a reason from a simple unwillingness to tidy up the appearance to a poor Internet connection that does not allow students to keep a stable video connection. Students from Africa and Latin America complained about regular problems with the Internet.

- the impossibility of 100% control of the students' learning process.

Connecting a student to a video conference gives the illusion of his automatic presence on the lesson. Some students can connect to an online lesson while on the road, in a store, or at a party. They can simultaneously engage in household chores, at best only listening to the conversation. The teacher is faced with the fact that a student who is formally present at the lesson does not hear the question and does not react to the teacher's remarks.

The problem is international. Teachers from other countries also note widespread fraud in distance learning. For example, Bri Stauffer says, “students may cheat when using digital tools. Cheating is a major problem in schools across the country, and students often take advantage of using technology to make cheating easier” [11].

The probability of not receiving the necessary information in an online lesson is much higher than in a full-time face-to-face lesson. Students need more attention and more self-organization to follow the progress of online classes.

- technical problems.

For the successful organization of online lessons, all students need access to technical training tools connected to the Internet. The most convenient is the use of a computer and a tablet (with a large screen and a separate keyboard), but many foreign students of PCF used their smartphones, which are poorly suited for uninterrupted long-term multimedia broadcasting. Technical problems during training and poor Internet speed were noted by 50% of PCF respondents in 2020 year.

- increase the screen time.

In e-learning, an increase in screen time is inevitable, since all communication with students is digital.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

1. When switching from full-time to distance learning, it is impossible to automatically replace full-time classes with online classes, since the latter differ from full-time ones in functionality. Classroom work in online training is transformed into contact work in online lessons (video conferences), online testing and communication via messengers.
2. Online classes with two-way communication are the basis of the training course.
3. The use of non-electronic textbooks, manuals and workbooks allows teacher to reduce the amount of screen time of students.

These conclusions allow us to create an effective distance-learning course, taking into account its positive and negative sides. New solutions should be applied to online learning problems. For example, the unstable operation of the Internet and the inability to attend an online lesson is compensated by the opportunity to watch the lesson on the record, get an individual consultation via messenger or get information from recommended books.

E-learning cannot completely reject non-electronic learning tools. Using printed books and workbooks, we can reduce the amount of screen time and give students the opportunity to write with their hands.

Distance learning and e-learning will develop, new solutions will appear that will make such training more effective and attractive, not only if it is impossible to come to the university.

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Ya.L. Chernyavskaya, Candidate of Philological Sciences (PhD in Philology), Associate Professor of the pre-University Department and Head of the Preparatory Course for Foreigners of the Tyumen State Medical University since the 2016. The author of articles on the methodology of teaching the Russian language to foreigners and 2 textbooks for future medical students who study Russian from the elementary level.

