
Conclusions

A website of distance courses authors in a form of a Club is suggested and implemented. The present method allows solving a whole series of contradictions arising when creating new distance courses. The approach allows widening teachers' geography interested in practical aspects of distance learning. The project is on the stage of implementing now, but this information will certainly be interesting for a wide range of teachers in Higher Educational Establishments attempting to inform about themselves in Internet.

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Authors' Information

Mykola Savchenko – Ph.D. in Physics and Math., Technical Cryophysics Department, National Technical University "KhPI". Address: Frunze st., 21. Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61002. e-mail: nsavchenko@kpi.kharkov.ua

Ganna Molodykh –National Technical University "KhPI"; e-mail: molodykh@kpi.kharkov.ua

E-SUPPORT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE TO ENHANCE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' LEARNING

Ganna Molodykh

***Abstract:** The peculiarities of English language teaching for students at higher educational establishment using some elements of distance learning, developed by the author, are described in this article. The results of students' questioning, received at the end of the experimental teaching, are suggested and analyzed. The conclusions are formulated and the further ways of teaching English with e-support are outlined.*

***Keywords:** Distance Learning, methods of teaching foreign languages, course with e-support for teaching, new functions of virtual learning space, questionnaire.*

***ACM Classification Keywords:** K3.1 Computer Uses in Education*

Topicality of teaching foreign languages using face-to-face lessons and e-support

Under the conditions of worldwide globalization and a tendency of Ukraine to be integrated into the world community, the knowledge of English at high level becomes one of the compulsory requirements for any specialist in any field of human activities. Teaching English at the Cross-Cultural Communication and Foreign

Languages Department in National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute" (<http://users.kpi.kharkov.ua/ccfl/gor>) is directed not only to the receiving traditional foreign languages skills – writing, reading, speaking and listening. We also make a stress on using basic skills in e-communication, on the ability to interact with Internet, learning spaces and to work with different communication tools in our teaching, which any young specialist – a graduate of our University – will face with in his/her professional activity.

Nowadays in Ukraine there are some examples of pure distance training of foreign languages specialized courses, such as, for example, in G. Kaluzhna's course [Kaluzhnaya, G., 2006] or B. Shunevich course [Shunevich, B., 2006]. In these courses the stress is made on written English, which could be taught and is easy to be checked at a distance.

The peculiarity of our teaching is the fact that we combine face-to-face and distance learning during the learning process. It is connected with the different level of our students' preparation and, correspondingly, the differences in their needs (speaking, studying grammar, development of listening skills etc.).

To teach beginners a lively talk, intonation, manners of concrete behavior is impossible without regular face-to-face students' contact with each other and the teacher. However, there are no developed methods and instructions for teachers about the combination of face-to-face and distant activities. That's why the article is devoted to solving this question.

Developing methods for foreign languages teaching using e-support

To study a foreign language fully while using traditional Distance Learning (DL), i.e. without face-to-face support, is practically impossible. The presence of live communication with a teacher and other students to receive maximum speaking practice is compulsory.

While implementing the distance course into the foreign languages learning it was noted that learning spaces do not correspond to the specific demands for the learning process being made of foreign language teachers. Specific teaching features of this subject made us to widen the functions of the space used in learning. As a result the virtual learning environment "Web-Class KhPI" [Web-Class KhPI, 2006] has been elaborated to be used in a foreign languages teaching.

The functions being performed now by the learning environment as e-support while teaching foreign languages:

1. Bulletin Board with the information about the homework for the next practical lesson, about the requirements to pass a credit or exam and other announcements;
2. Backed up materials of scanned pages from text-books to be uploaded and printed by students;
3. Providing audio files (*.mp3) with authentic foreign speech to be uploaded and listened. This allows students to perform all the listening tasks independently, at his/her speed, with as many times for listening as needed.
4. Training before e-testing using the developed interactive tasks for students' self-control.
5. E-tests with unlimited or limited times for passing them. Students' interest in being honest is provided by a face-to-face exam or credit at the end of the course (depending on the syllabus).
6. Informing students about the results of assessment according to the rating system;
7. Help while performing home task due to the presence of the built-in e-vocabularies on the web-site and links to the modern e-dictionaries in Internet;
8. Links to the backed up materials for additional home reading indicating the volume of the text in symbols and in megabytes.
9. Possibility for the teacher to replace additional Internet links on the web-site to organize students' project work.

All the mentioned peculiarities above have been developed for the distance course "English for Information Technologies" (see Fig.1).

A question of current importance is: which of these activities could be performed individually by students, which could be performed in a face-to-face mode.

With a face-to-face support all kinds of students' activity should be performed at the beginning of work with a learning space (the first two-three weeks of learning). And later:

- listening (to have discussions according to the materials being heard),
- performing interactive tasks for self-control and training before passing the control testing;
- testing (to provide students' independent work without any help, to receive objective results).

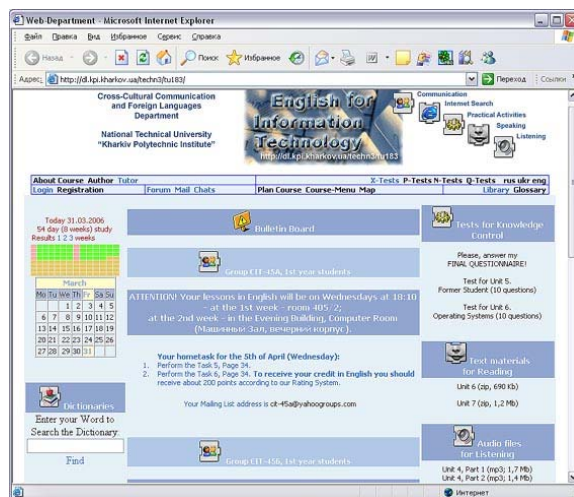


Fig.1. Distance course «English for Information Technologies», <http://dl.kpi.kharkov.ua/techn3/tu183>

At the same time students' work using computer should necessarily take turns with oral communication to a teacher and other students. Our experience shows that the organizational difficulties appear during a face-to-face lesson if the teacher began it with the work using computers. After that students can hardly switch to face-to-face activities, i.e. working with different speed they cannot finish performing the computer tasks simultaneously. That's why the work using computers should be left till the final stage of a lesson.

For an independent students' work, in fact, any practical activity can be put. However, it is possible only when the teacher is sure that all the students can log into the system and know what and where can be found on the web-site and how to work with it.

Practical Research Results

The Distance Course "English for Information Technologies" is placed in Internet <http://dl.kpi.kharkov.ua/techn3/tu183>, and also in the local area network of the University, so it can be reached easily and freely by students. 25 students studied in the English course during one term – from September till December, 2005. The compulsory activity in their learning was visiting face-to-face lessons and using some elements of DL (in particular, electronic testing).

At the end of the course the author carried out a questionnaire among students that allowed making some conclusions about the success of using such learning for foreign languages teaching in the Higher School. Let us consider the results of the questionnaire more precisely.

1. Why do you think e-testing was used in our course? Was it helpful for you? Why?

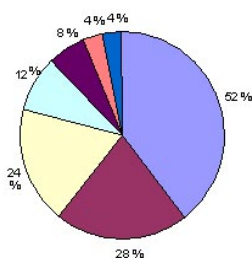


Fig.2. Reasons for using e-testing by students.

52% - it is very convenient, tests could be passed any time and in any place;

28% - it helps to improve my knowledge of English;

24% - it helps to put into practice my self-evaluation;

12% - it helps teacher to put into practice the evaluation of students' level;

8% - it saves teacher's time on control implementing;

4% - it helps to get the additional skills of work using computers;

4% - it is hard to say.

2. Did you like studying the English course with distance learning elements? What did you like / did not like and why?

96% of students noted that they liked to study in the experimental course. Among the reasons they mentioned the following:

- there is an opportunity to put questions exactly when they appear, without looking for the teacher at the University or waiting for the next lesson;
- perfect design of the web-site;
- saving time;
- mobility and understanding of the teacher;
- it was possible to check the mistakes if the test were passed unsuccessfully and to correct them;
- it was easy to get access to all the materials and tests sitting at home;
- this term was the most interesting in the whole course of English;
- it was interesting because it was a new form of learning.

Among the things that they did not like, one student mentioned the presence of some misprints in formulations of test questions. It requires further course improving.

3. What was not sufficient in the course?

- 60% - everything was sufficient;
- 24% - a number of face-to-face lessons was not sufficient;
- 8% - a stable and constant access to Internet was not sufficient;
- 4% - I would like more attention to the English grammar;
- 4% - I would like more attention to listening.

4. Was the workload in the course sufficient for you during this term?

- 8% - yes, it was more than sufficient;
- 60% - yes, it was sufficient;
- 20% - no, it was not rather sufficient;
- 8% - no, it was not sufficient.

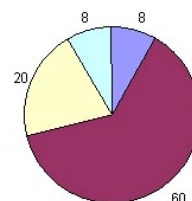


Fig.3. Adequacy of workload in the course (%).

5. What was useful for you in such e-support (distance course) in studying English?

- I became more interested in English and began to study more.
- I received more practice using Internet.
- I could download all the necessary materials easily, without leaving my home.
- I have improved my knowledge of English.
- It was convenient to answer the test tasks.
- I maintained close contact with the teacher.
- I have seen my gaps in my knowledge of English and understood what should be improved.

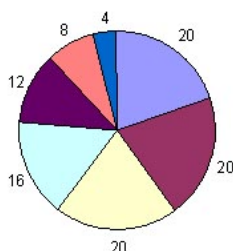


Fig.4. What disturbed you? (%)

6. What disturbed you in studying English?

- 20% - work, a lack of time;
- 20% - I felt too lazy and absent-minded;
- 20% - nothing;
- 16% - a big workload at the University in other subjects;
- 12% - poor Internet connection;
- 8% - uncomfortable schedule;
- 4% - backward group mates in the level of English.

7. Have your skills of working with computer improved after this course?

40% - no, they have not improved;

36% - yes, they have improved a little;

16% - yes, they have improved.

At the same time among students whose skills, according to their answers, have not improved, there were people who noted that their level of working with computer was very high before the course. That's why we can make a conclusion that using the elements of DL in teaching foreign languages has a positive effect on students' computer literacy improvement.

8. Has your vocabulary in professional terms been improved after this course?

0% - no, it has not been improved;

36% - yes, it has been improved a little;

44% - yes, it has been improved;

20% - yes, it has been improved considerably.

Conclusions

The results of students' answers to the questionnaire allow making a conclusion that it is necessary to use the elements of DL in teaching foreign languages. It is interesting for students, it allows them to control their success in learning better and easier, it improves students' vocabulary in professional terms and improves their computer literacy.

Our experience and questionnaire showed that even in groups with homogeneous participants in the level of English knowledge there are often students whose experience in using English does differ significantly from the experience of other students. That's why the teacher, using e-support in teaching, should allocate the learning materials of different complexity levels, additional materials in grammar, listening, video and audio materials for student's independent study on the web-site. Students' additional activity can be not evaluated in the rating system of the course; however, it allows students who wish to study more to get an access to any necessary materials.

In future the author plans to consider the students' wishes, to elaborate and improve the testing system of the distance course. The necessity of individual approach to any learner requires considering all the wishes that students had, that's why it is planned to add more additional text materials of "Upper-Intermediate" and "Advanced" levels.

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Authors' Information

Ganna Molodykh – Educational Environments Institute, Pedagogical Sciences Academy of Ukraine. Address: Barabashova st., 38-A, room 47, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61168. e-mail: molodykh@kpi.kharkov.ua