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FROM BLENDED LEARNING TO ONLINE TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AT NON-LINGUISTIC HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS OF UKRAINE

Summary

The implications and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world educational community and the necessity to keep social distancing requirements and lockdown rules have sped up the course of evolution in education, causing rapid transition from Web-enhanced learning processes through blended language learning techniques to fully online learning. When traditional face-to-face communication between teachers and students became impossible, the learning process switched to online and distance learning tools, which considering the need for communicative demand of foreign language teaching methods, produces necessity for particular attention and concern.

The primary objective of the article is to analyze different distance learning tools and technologies as well as videoconferencing software in order to evaluate their benefits and adaptability to teaching English for Specific Purposes needs. The study used a number of general research methods: systems analysis – for disclosure of psychological-pedagogical and educational-methodical research results on the technological direction of the modern methodological conception; analysis and synthesis – to study the stages of technological influence on the foreign language teaching process; comparative analysis – to evaluate the most popular and commonly used distance learning and videoconferencing platforms. Generalization and prognostic methods have been applied for conclusions formulation.

The article analyzes stages of technological influence on the teaching a foreign language process as well as clarifies definitions of related to it notions (web-enhanced, blended, hybrid, fully online learning). It specifies advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous learning tools, dwells on positive and negative trends in fully online versus face-to-face EFL teaching process organization. A study of videoconferencing platforms like Zoom, GoogleMeet, BigBlueButton and an analysis of their applicability to teaching English

needs has been carried out. Conducted analysis of distance learning tools, online teaching technologies as well as videoconferencing software is of practical importance for foreign language teachers who organize online language classes and can be applied for teaching English for Specific Purposes needs. Further research will be needed to analyze the characteristics and features of an array of distance education platforms as well as videoconferencing software that did not fit into the scope of this article.

Keywords: technological influence, face-to-face/ web-enhanced/ blended/ hybrid/ fully online learning model, synchronous/ asynchronous tools, distance education platform, videoconferencing software

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ВІД МОДЕЛЕЙ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ ДО ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ ВИКЛАДАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ОНЛАЙН В НЕЛІНГВІСТИЧНИХ ВИЩИХ НАВЧАЛЬНИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ УКРАЇНИ

Анотація

Актуальність. Постановка проблеми. Глобальні наслідки пандемії Covid-19, необхідність дотримання вимог соціальної дистанції та правил локдауну призвели до прискореної еволюції освітнього процесу, спричинивши швидкий перехід від збагаченого інтернет-технологіями традиційного аудиторного навчання, технологій змішаного навчання до повноцінної online-організації освітнього процесу. Коли традиційне особисте спілкування між викладачами та студентами стало неможливим, процес навчання перейшов на інструменти online та дистанційного навчання, які, враховуючи вимогу актуалізації комунікативного спрямування у викладанні іноземної мови, потребують особливої уваги та розгляду.

Основною **метою статті** є аналіз різних засобів та технологій дистанційного навчання, а також програмного забезпечення для відеоконференцій, щоб оцінити їхні переваги/недоліки та пристосованість до викладання англійської мови професійного спрямування. **Методологія.** У дослідженні використано низку загальнонаукових методів: системний аналіз результатів психолого-педагогічних та навчально-методичних досліджень технологізації сучасної методологічної концепції; аналіз та

синтез для вивчення етапів технологічного впливу на процес викладання іноземної мови; порівняльний аналіз – для оцінки найпопулярніших та найбільш часто використовуваних платформ дистанційного навчання та відеоконференцій. Узагальнюючі та прогностичні методи застосовувались у формулюванні висновків.

Результати. У статті проаналізовано етапи технологічного впливу на процес викладання іноземної мови, а також уточнено зміст пов'язаних понять (визначені вдосконалена веб-ресурсами/змішана/гібридна/повністю онлайн навчальні моделі). Окреслені переваги та недоліки синхронних та асинхронних інструментів навчання, встановлені позитивні та негативні тенденції online навчання на противагу аудиторному викладанню. Проведено огляд платформ відеоконференцій, таких як Zoom, GoogleMeet, BigBlueButton, та розглянуто їх пристосованість до потреб викладання англійської мови.

Практичне значення. Здійснений аналіз засобів дистанційного навчання, online-технологій, а також програмного забезпечення для відеоконференцій має практичне значення для викладачів іноземних мов, які організовують навчання online, та може застосовуватися для викладання іноземної мови професійного спрямування. **Перспективи подальших досліджень**. Подальші дослідження потребуватимуть аналізу характеристик та особливостей низки платформ дистанційної освіти, а також програмного забезпечення для відеоконференцій, яке не входить у сферу дії цієї статті.

Ключові слова: технологічний вплив, модель очного / вдосконаленого веб-ресурсами / змішаного/ гібридного / повністю онлайн навчання, синхронні / асинхронні інструменти, платформа дистанційної освіти, програмне забезпечення для відео конференцій.

Кількість джерел: 8; кількість таблиць: 1.

Problem statement. Modern professional training of competent specialists in the light of requirements to introduce latest teaching technologies creates complex creative challenges for the organization and dynamic transformation of educational and methodological support in accordance with the technological direction of the modern methodological conception. This is especially true for foreign language teaching methods, the importance of which is constantly growing in the context of current globalization processes and international cooperation strengthening.

Significant increase in the interest towards learning foreign languages, English in particular, is caused by expanding international contacts and growing integration of the country into the world community and enhanced by rapid informatization and computerization

of all activities in society: production, science, education, culture, etc. An urgent demand for specialists proficient in foreign languages leads to constant search for ways to improve the educational system, one of the areas of which is the study of methods and forms of learning organization through usage of computer technologies in close cooperation with distance education tools as well as developing effective distance learning courses.

The implications and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world educational community and the necessity to keep social distancing requirements or even more – lockdown rules – have sped up the course of evolution in education, causing rapid transition from Web-enhanced learning processes through blended language learning techniques to fully online learning. Thus, when traditional face-to-face communication between teachers and students became impossible, the learning process switched to online and distance learning tools, which considering the need for communicative demand of foreign language teaching methods, produces necessity for particular attention and concern.

Analysis of recent studies. The tasks, objectives, methods of formation and results of blended learning teaching models have been investigated in the works of miscellaneous Ukrainian and foreign scholars (B. Tomlinson, C. Whittaker, A. Majumdar, O. Pugaczova, I. Maksak, L. Grebinnyk, etc.). Mentioned scientists provide basic theoretical characteristics of the technology as well as offer practical recommendations for its implementation in EFL classroom. Distance learning techniques, its didactical grounds as well as conditions of usage have been studied in the works of A. Andreev, K. Kolos, V. Kucharenko, J. Adams and others. Particularly important nowadays is the comparative analysis of different distance learning platforms as well as videoconferencing services provided by N. Basaraba, S. Romaniuk, A. Hagler, N. Drake and B. Turner, who analyze basic technical features, advantages and drawbacks which help teachers to

choose the best software for online teaching process organization. All those investigations and scientific study results constitute an important basis for further research, especially in the field of teaching English for Specific Purposes online in the conditions of Covid-19 pandemic and the new educational challenges, which urge for the formation of a flexible distance learning course that could combine synchronous and asynschronous learning activities and substitute face-to-face teaching methods with maximum productivity.

In this respect, **the primary objective** of the article is to analyze different distance learning tools and technologies as well as videoconferencing software in order to evaluate their benefits and adaptability to teaching English for Specific Purposes needs. It is well known that teaching a foreign language is a specific task, which is aimed mostly at improving communicative skills as well as teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing in one simultaneous complex that poses special challenges when the function and influence of a teacher as an instructor and / or facilitator is transformed from off-line to online modes.

Basic material. Contemporary students need a special approach and highly qualified specialists in the field of modern education, which would encourage young generation to learn foreign languages and love to study. The use of digital resources helps students at universities, stimulates their thinking, provides new opportunities.

Students who were born in the world of information technology and spend a lot of time in social networks, on various web platforms and in general on the Internet, and trust the ideas of the web space more than the postulates in well-known textbooks, need special approaches which would stimulate awareness and enhance their motivation, as well as an appropriate technological platform for the formation of their knowledge and skills. Thus foreign language teachers should constantly review their teaching methods in compliance with nowadays demands [4, p.40].

The evolution in the technology role for the educational process is related to the advance from distance to online learning. Distance learning was an attempt to solve the temporal and spatial limitations of traditional face-to-face education; online learning was the consequence of full reception of technology as part of our lives.

It is important to understand the stages of technological influence on the teaching a foreign language process as well as to clarify definitions of related to it notions. For better visualization let's take a look at the table presenting taxonomy of terms adopted from British Council book "Blended Learning in English Language Teaching: Course Design and Implementation" [8, p.12]:

Term	Definition
Web-enhanced	Subjects that make use of a minimal amount of online materials, such as posting a syllabus and course announcements.
Blended	Subjects that utilize some significant online activities in otherwise face-to-face learning, but less than 45 per cent.
Hybrid	Subjects in which online activities replace 45–80 per cent of face-to-face class meetings.
Fully online	Subjects in which 80 per cent or more of learning materials are conducted online.

As one may see from the table, what started as a web-enhanced course – a combination of mostly face-to-face traditional learning model, making the use of fragmental online aids – turned into a fully online teaching practice with practically no or a minimal fraction of face-to-face interaction. Covid-19 pandemic and the necessity to organize learning process under lockdown conditions has significantly facilitated the transition.

Besides being the only possible variant of educational process organization under recent epidemiological conditions, fully online learning was very soon appreciated for its multiple advantages. First is its flexibility: with the help of distance learning programs, students can take the desired courses from anywhere and anytime using a computer, a webcam with an acceptable resolution (1080p) and a microphone (many webcams already have it built-in) as well as Internet connection. This is especially helpful for Ukrainian third-,

fourth- and fifth-year students, who mostly work part-time and need to combine education and working schedules. Thus, when training materials and instructions can be obtained online anytime, it is easier for working students to comply with their curriculum.

Second advantage of online education is its enhanced level of comfort. Since there is no need to go anywhere (e.g. to school or university), one may enjoy an online course from one's own sofa with a cup of good coffee. Teaching with videoconferencing platforms like Zoom, GoogleMeet, BigBlueButton and others is very convenient to the teacher as well. The whole teaching process is greatly facilitated by certain features, which help the class to stay focused, mainly chat, interactive whiteboard as well as screen share options. Firstly, the chat function allows instructors to insert URLs, pictures, and documents so that the entire class can see these materials in real time. The screen-share option, which allows instructors to share their desktop with the entire class and automatically project the necessary material onto the students' laptops, enables the students to stay on track, even if they are not physically in the class with their instructor. This can be used when reading a new text, doing different lexical, phonetic or grammar exercises, when the teacher projects the necessary fragment of work, everyone gets concentrated on it.

In addition to the convenience of taking the course at home, students will have a great opportunity to save more on tuition. Since distance learning takes place online, it means that students do not have to spend money and time on trips to and from their classroom, renting a flat in another city, paying for lunches in a canteen. Another important issue is of psychological character. There are a number of scholars linking videoconferenced interactions that aim at fostering foreign language speaking skills with issues of self-confidence, anxiety and communication apprehension. For example, Kinginger analyzed classroom interactions taking place between language learners in the US and France via international videoconferencing. The research

project aimed at identifying the morphosyntactic and discourse difficulties experienced by American second language learners interacting with native speakers of French. She found that much of the language use that took place during the conference was beyond these learners' capabilities, due in part to heightened language classroom anxiety, and in part to differences between the variety of French learned in American schools and the French spoken by educated native speakers [5, p.192].

Despite so many advantages, online learning has its peculiarities, if not to name them drawbacks. The most important for young learners is lack of social interaction. Studying in a real institution gives students the opportunity to meet and communicate in person with people from different places. Distance learning restricts students only to Internet-based classes and learning materials. Although students can interact through chats, whiteboards, emails, and / or video conferencing software, this experience cannot be compared to a traditional face-to-face communication.

Besides, the shift from offline to fully online teaching practice constitutes new challenges for teachers in the choice of most effective tools that not only lead to language skills improvement, but also keep students' motivation high and sparkle interest towards learning. Let's analyze the most popular online methods of teaching a foreign language to understand their peculiarities necessary for the efficient online learning conditions formation.

The design of e-learning courses is usually based on a specific context using webinars, video clips, audio scripts, forums, charts, ICQ, videoconferencing, online testing, interactive textbooks and whiteboards. E-learning technology tools can be divided into two major groups: synchronous (chats, ICQ, videoconferencing, interactive boards) and asynchronous (electronic mail, blogs, forums, social networks, video and audio podcasts, online testing). The asynchronous nature of network communications allows users to engage in a

dialogue, forum or chart at any convenient time, regardless of time or location. However synchronous tools help to provide live interaction between students and their teacher, solve problematic issues on the spot, correct and facilitate if anything is wrong immediately, which in its turn is a very close approximation of face-to-face learning mode.

To be more precise, there are numerous advantages and disadvantages of both synchronous and asynchronous means of e-learning and data transmission. For example, while videoconferencing and chats maintain personal interaction with students; offer them direct visual and voice contact; enable reception of non-verbal signals that support the interaction; provide timely support through instant feedback and can be characterized by immediacy, operational cooperation, and language spontaneity similar to natural conversation, they simultaneously have multiple drawbacks which should be taken into consideration in the course planning process.

First and very important is technological difficulties. This fact is a general drawback of web-based technologies and does not, necessarily, signify a fault of videoconferences. Internet bandwidth is of great importance here. For video connection to be effective, you need it to be high. Without sufficient bandwidth, the sound drops in and out, forcing students and instructors to ask each other to repeat themselves. This may be very annoying and pose additional load to vocal cords. In this sense, bandwidth is a potential problem for students from, or temporarily residing in, places with low quality internet connection. And it is also the cause of noticeable voice transmission setbacks which make immediate corrections of students' mistakes a difficult undertaking.

Besides when instructors introduce videoconferencing to fresh and technically unprepared students, they should allow the so-called learning curve necessary for students to use the technology effectively. Most videoconferencing services like Zoom or Viber need their applications to be installed first and require the students to undergo a

simple registration process before proper operation starts. Thus instructors should account for some additional time for everyone to become technologically competent before the actual lesson begins. Some supplementary five minutes might be necessary for everyone to join the lesson as there is always the so-called downtime when students gradually get connected to the virtual classroom.

Another significant problem is fragmentation of learning – students may appear in situations which distract their attention. Since instructors cannot see the screens of their students, unless they share them with the class, no one has any idea what everyone is doing. Consequently, students prone to distraction may have other web-pages open on their screens during some portions or even the whole class. Many of them turn off their camera and voice buttons so that everything that is available is a name projected onto a black square. To rectify the problem an instructor needs to constantly check the students' involvement and ask for feedback throughout the class. Ideally, instructors should only offer videoconferencing lessons to extremely disciplined and highly motivated students as lack of face-to-face contact makes it harder to stay focused throughout the course of an entire lesson. Thus, if distractions could effortlessly derail the class, instructors may want to reconsider which students they teach via videoconferencing tools.

Communication between students during the class is another important consideration for online instructors. On the whole, interaction between students which hindered so much an offline class is minimal in videoconferencing because each user hears instantly whoever is speaking and what about. However, as only one speaker is available at a time in a virtual classroom, pair work, which is an important element of communication training in an offline class, should be eliminated. There is no way for students to separate into smaller groups and talk among themselves. Therefore, to increase the level of student participation foreign language videoconference lessons should be designed for a relatively small class size.

The biggest drawback of videoconferencing in comparison to face-to-face class is difficulty in students' progress assessment as well as evaluation of the degree of their task performance independence. When checking vocabulary memorization, reciting poems or text retelling it is difficult to eliminate cheating as students may peep into the list of words or even read the original poem/text open on their computer screens with impunity quite unnoticed. A good idea here is to ask them to pass the necessary oral testing with their eyes closed, which enables the instructor to adequately assess his or her students' endeavors. Writing dictations – an important element of an offline language class – also appears complicated. At this point a videoconferencing course should be supplemented by asynchronous means of e-learning like online testing.

Asynchronous means of e-learning and data transmission have the following advantages:

• offer additional time and opportunity to consider the decision and think over the answer;

• provide opportunity for full participation in the communication process at any time;

• give a sense of comfort when communicating in writing;

• the speed of speech can be changed, and students with different language skills can be easily involved in the course;

• enable minimal dependence on time, place and planning process.

However asynchronous tools lead to a delay of feedback for hours or even days. Whenever a group decision is to be made, the process may take a much longer period than in the usual face-to-face practice. Moreover, lack of personal contact and verbal communication lowers motivation as the so-called rapport between an instructor and students cannot be built. Shortage of direct bilateral interaction, which characterizes many asynchronous tools, in general opposes the goals of foreign language teaching as language presupposes interaction and communication to function properly. Nevertheless, when the

interaction has been provided for, distance technologies can maintain the integrity of foreign language teaching. Thus, learning strategies that encourage student-teacher dialogue as well as support student autonomy should be incorporated into distance learning programs.

Conclusions. Considering all pros and cons of the synchronous and asynchronous teaching means, it is quite obvious that an efficient online learning course should be a combination of both and make the most of the new technological possibilities which e-learning offers. Thus, to provide for live conversations, reception of non-verbal signals, enable the immediacy and spontaneity of response, creating time pressure on the participants to process input and provide output in real time, one should devote 70-80 per cent of scheduled time for videoconferencing activities, which might include mutual text reading, grammar explanations, vocabulary chores, solving problems, building up dialogues, text retelling, etc. In this respect the audiovisual channel of communication and time pressure which entail the need for an immediate response definitely put the videoconferencing context very close to a real-life authentic situation.

Meanwhile videoconferencing should be supplemented by asynchronous tools, devoting 20-30 per cent of scheduled time or hours dedicated to students' individual work to them, such as computer testing or writing tasks for example. Immediate testing can simplify the process of students' progress assessment as there is no need to spend lots of time on test papers correction. Platforms like Google Classroom and Moodle record the loading time of the completed task by the student, and therefore the teacher can accurately track the timeliness of student performance. Furthermore, asynchronous educational tools help to significantly reduce the problem of skipping classes, as students have the opportunity to independently process the material in electronic form and perform all necessary practical tasks.

On the whole, online education can entirely substitute an offline learning process when properly organized. However, this mode of

language teaching produces special challenges for instructors as though the process is facilitated in many ways, e-teaching has its peculiarities which need to be taken into consideration to guarantee a desired result.

Prospects for further research. This article has only been able to touch upon the most general features of online educational tools, distance learning platforms and services and characterize the whole process of online teaching regardless of specific technological peculiarities of definite software. Further research will be needed to analyze the characteristics and features of each distance education platform or videoconferencing software to understand its applicability towards language learning needs as well as efficiency of results.

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