

AMURCON 2020
International Scientific Conference**STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TO DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING
AT KEMEROVO STATE UNIVERSITY**N. S. Godzhaeva (a)*, Y. N. Tochilina (b)
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(b) Kemerovo State University, 6 Krasnaya St., Kemerovo, Russia, totschiлина-juli@mail.ru**Abstract**

Because of COVID-19, we are experiencing a watershed moment for education systems around the world. Most professors and students suddenly find themselves forced to use new technology for teaching and learning. Improving the quality of teaching foreign languages as part of training professionals has always been a topical task for Russian universities. Therefore, today it is necessary for higher education institutions to build a technological foundation and digital competence in order to survive this crisis and enter a new era of teaching and learning in the digital world. However, introducing distant format studies can be itself a new great challenge for university. The purpose of this article is to explore the students' attitude of the use of distance language learning. The study is based on the experience of Kemerovo State University in implementing of digital technologies for distance learning at Institute of History and International Relationships. The paper presents the design of distant foreign language course and summarizes the results of surveys among university students, revealing their perception of this format studies and showing the need for specific learning activities to boost learners' motivation and their mastering course content. During this experiment, the process of studying foreign languages was based on the systematic use of such digital technologies as InfoUpro (electronic information and educational environment of Kemerovo State University) and Moodle. It should be noted that despite significant positive changes in the perception of distance learning Russian universities, however, has not yet developed a full awareness of changes and their results for the application of this digital technologies in practice.

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Keywords: Distance learning, methodology, digital technologies in education, online teaching and learning foreign languages, student engagement, motivation



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1. Introduction

The education system in our country is undergoing qualitative changes. Qualitatively new relations between Russia and the countries of the world community, new political and socio-economic realities have created favourable opportunities for learning foreign languages and filled the teaching of this subject with new content. Due to various objective reasons, the needs for foreign languages were different in different periods. New economic and political factors in various spheres of society have radically changed the status of a foreign language as an academic subject. Research shows that in order to prevent a decline in interest in learning foreign languages, it is necessary to support motives, primarily internal ones, for further self-development of the motivational sphere.

A real "breakthrough" in the quality of foreign language training of a specialist of higher qualification is possible subject to significant changes in the process of foreign language training at the university through the introduction of innovative educational technologies focused on the professional sphere and providing clear criteria for assessing language competencies.

In this regard, it is necessary to create new approaches in universities to developing students' professional competences that would be based on innovated teaching technologies. Particularly, modern researchers emphasize that "the updating Russian system of higher education requires new educational technologies associated closely with today's life, forming an active civil position of a future specialist" (Starchikova et al., 2018).

For the past year, Kemerovo State University has been organizing, along with the traditional academic program, the distance learning program for its students. The technological platforms for the distance learning system are the InfoUpro and Moodle systems. The systems have proved itself in practice. However, the common practice of foreign language teaching and learning poses a series of specific requirements for the distance learning system, which are difficult or almost impossible to implement.

It should be noted, however, that the field of computer-assisted language learning "is constantly undergoing change because of technological innovation that creates opportunities to conduct new research and challenge established beliefs about the ways in which teaching and learning can be carried out with and without a human teacher" (Beatty, 2013, p. 1).

The overall aims of foreign language education have also been subject to change. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) emphasizes the importance of "plurilingualism and pluricultural competence" and calls on educators to develop their learners' ability to apply their linguistic and communicative skills across various languages and communicative situations.

In the light of these new objectives, many foreign language educators have looked to the potential of networked technologies to enhance and supplement the traditional activities of the communicative classroom, which are often seen as limited and over-focussed on the exchange of information (Block & Cameron, 2001).

Distance learning is one of the alternative approaches, which can be replaced with face to face or traditional learning and is one of the key factors in the development of higher education (Taylor, 2001).

The use of an electronic educational environment is designed to help in building the educational process and increase the interest of cadets and students in learning a foreign language due to the large number of opportunities that it has.

In the current conditions of dynamic development of innovative teaching technologies, the latest technical means are gradually becoming a mandatory component of professionally oriented training in higher pedagogical schools. Studies also began to appear which showed that distance learning yielded results in student achievement comparable to those in face-to-face learning settings. Most of these results concerned discrete aspects of language learning, for example, individual grammatical structures and specific parts of individual course (Collentine, 2000, p. 44).

The economic situation also pushes higher education to be saturated with the latest technology. There is no doubt that the future of higher education is connected with the development of the achievements of scientific and technological progress in the educational process, especially new information professional-oriented teaching technologies and, above all, information and computer support for training courses.

Obviously, all these changes pose the most important task for practitioners: the correction of didactic attitudes and recommendations that take into account the change in the presentation of educational material, in the organization of students' activities in accordance with the new conditions.

In order to provide for higher institutions comparable foreign language learning experiences, it is necessary to implement good practices for distance education and see if tools and techniques geared towards distance foreign language learning also could be used successfully. The computer has ushered in not just a new technology but new ways of viewing knowledge, the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, and the very relation between teachers and their students and between students themselves.

This article presents an empirical study undertaken in KemSU (Kemerovo State University) to evaluate the relative advantages and limitations of teaching foreign language via the use of on-line technology. The objective of this research is to evaluate the students' perception of the use of distance learning within language course.

2. Problem Statement

Understanding of technology use for learning and teaching language skills requires knowledge of research about how that language skill is learned.

Teachers have implemented distance-learning technologies in varying forms, such as web quests, multimedia tasks, and specific interactive exercises. While many success stories exist, several studies present shortcoming of distance learning education.

Although many teachers are aware that different learning styles exist, they consider that the same teaching methods that work in their traditional classes will also work for distance learning.

English language learning through distance or online delivery has unique requirements, notably the need for interaction and communicative practice.

Although distance learning continues to grow rapidly, it remains at an early stage of development. Consequently, developers and deliverers of online learning need more understanding of how students perceive and react to elements of e-learning (since student perception and attitude is critical to motivation

and learning) along with how to apply these approaches most effectively to enhance learning (Smart & Cappel, 2006, p. 201).

This research is discusses the students' attitude of the application of distance foreign language learning forms at Institute of History and International Relationships. Of course, not all of the above exhausts the problems that arise with the introduction of distance learning in the educational process. However, the awareness of such difficulties should not lead to the rejection of the use of information technologies in the educational process, but to the search for other methodological approaches to the introduction of distance learning.

3. Research Questions

Awareness of a problem can derive from various sources, including technology development and the process of language learning.

The pervasive integration of online distance education in some form or another over the last decades raises some questions, what students' attitudes towards the integration of distance education are, how learning foreign languages in a distance format can motivate students to be involved in the learning process. Online learning is as effective as a traditional classroom setting. What the challenges are that students face during the mastering of educational material, whether there are statistically significant differences between those students who prefer online and those who prefer traditional foreign language classes.

These questions were answered by the results from the questionnaire, which was designed and distributed to 96 students who took Language classes.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to analyze the educational potentialities of distance language learning and to examine student attitude towards learning foreign languages by means of digital technologies in order to determine what challenges are that students face while using technical learning tools, as well as student satisfaction with distance learning and student readiness for distance language learning.

5. Research Methods

This research deals with students' attitude towards distance learning applied in language courses at Kemerovo State University. The experimental study was carried out at the Institute of History and International Relationships. Instrumental and methodical apparatus of this research consisted of a causal-comparative and correlational design as it explored student readiness and satisfaction towards learning language online and measured their satisfaction with their online classes. The research was quantitative and used survey, which allows us to analyze how students accept and use digital technologies in foreign language learning.

The participants were first-, second-, third- and fourth - year students, who took their classes fully online. The authors conducted an online anonymous survey of Kemerovo State University students studying in various specialties of the bachelor's program. However, when dealing with data, they require the researcher to have an understanding in terms of how to handle them.

The developed techniques will be characterized as descriptive methodology. The purpose of any research is a scientifically based interpretation of the facts studied. The primary material must be processed, namely, ordered and analyzed. After the survey of respondents, the research data is analyzed. This is the key stage. It is a set of techniques and methods aimed at checking whether the assumptions and hypotheses were correct, as well as answering the questions asked. This stage is probably the most difficult in terms of intellectual effort and professional qualifications, but it allows you to get the most useful information from the collected data.

Finally, to achieve the purpose, the method of summarizing and synthesizing scientific information is used.

6. Findings

The language teachers in Kemerovo State University who were involved in distance learning used different remote methods of teaching foreign languages using the Internet. There are a number of platforms Moodle, Zoom, InfoUpro and others. These services have a set of unique didactic features, providing an intensification and interactivity of the educational process. The specificity of each model of the distance learning process determines the selection and structuring of the content, means, forms and methods of teaching. The systems are focused primarily on the organization of constant interaction between the teacher and the students, providing effective feedback, despite the distance from the place of training. Such platforms make it possible to effectively organize the learning process, using such opportunities as conducting seminars, webinars, and tests including various objects and links to Internet resources in the lesson, as well as providing qualitative and quantitative control of the student's knowledge.

For the participating students, the web-based environment was described as an online space that would give them the opportunity to extend their language-learning environment outside of the classroom in collaboration with fellow students. The students were instructed to visit the site where the web-based platform was hosted together with instructions of how to access and use it.

96 respondents took part in the survey. The questionnaire was distributed during March – October 2020. Statistics of the responses to the survey are presented in tables with percentages of responses displayed.

The questions in the questionnaire were grouped into two main dimensions:

Table 1. Student Foreign Language Level(n=96)

Reference Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Main Foreign Language		
Beginner	54	56.25
Intermediate	30	31.25
Advanced	12	12.50
Second Foreign Language		
Beginner	52	54.16
Intermediate	2	2.08
Advanced	0	0.00

The data represented in Table 1 above suggest, that many students are at beginner levels (54students (56.25%) / 52 students (54.16%)) followed by students at intermediate levels (30 students (31.25%)). Advanced students are less typical of the learners served by the target group (12 students (12.50%)). This may be related to the fact that many learners are students of non-linguistic department.

Table 2. The Results of Surveying Students’ Attitudes to Distance Language Learning (number of respondents with percentage of responses in brackets, n=96)

Selected Survey Questions	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
I have received enough instructions and guidance on using the e-course.	59 (61.46)	0 (0.00)	37 (38.54)
Platform tasks are presented logically correctly.	40 (41.67)	53 (55.20)	3 (3.13)
The distance-learning mode gives me enough time to complete tasks.	53 (55.21)	21(21.87)	22 (22.92)
The design of materials for distance learning is attractive.	42 (43.75)	37 (38.54)	17 (17.71)
Language learning through web-based environment increased my motivation to reach success.	24 (25.00)	27 (28.12)	45 (46.88)
Digital technologies made language learning more authentic for me.	72 (75.00)	19 (19.79)	5 (5.21)
Distance learning helps me to understand the material better.	19 (19.79)	30 (31.25)	47 (48.96)
Low internet connection speed makes it difficult for distance learning.	80 (83.33)	11 (11.46)	5 (5.21)
Distance learning improves my foreign language skills.	42 (43.75)	21 (21.88)	33 (34.37)

Research questions of the survey mainly focused on the educational environment in which the distance language learning takes place.

During distance learning, students were offered instructions and guidance on how to use e-courses. 59 students (61.46%) of the total number of respondents believed that they were enough to master the course, 37 students (38.54%) gave a negative answer. Assignments for most courses in foreign languages during distance learning were posted at the Institute of History and International Relations on the Moodle and InfoUpro platforms. 40 respondents (41.67%) considered that the tasks were presented logically correctly, 3 students (3.13%) gave a negative answer. The number of participants who could not tell or did not know the answer to this question was very high (53 students (55.20%)). One can assume that the high frequencies for “can’t tell/don’t know” to these questions may be because some students did not use the Moodle and InfoUpro platforms at all.

53 respondents (55.20%) agreed that the distance-learning mode provides enough time to complete tasks, 22 people (22.92%) gave a negative answer to this question, 21 people (21.87%) found it difficult to answer.

It is undeniable that the low speed of the Internet connection causes difficulties in the distance-learning mode. 80 people (83.33%) of the total number of respondents agree with this. Five people (5.21%) gave a negative answer and 11 students (11.46%) found it difficult to answer.

The opportunity to listen to native speakers' speech and attractiveness of the use of digital technologies for students are the most valued aspects. It should be noted that the number of respondents agreeing with these statements still exceeds the number of respondents disagreeing with them (72 (75.00%) / 5 (5.21%).

The statements about students' motivation and assimilation of material, in our opinion, are the most important and may represent part of the conclusion to be drawn from this survey. Unfortunately, the conclusion drawn from the students' answers is not in favor of distance learning in the study of foreign languages. 45 people (46.88%) versus 24 (25%) (who agreed) believe that the distance learning mode did not increase their motivation to achieve success. The number of hesitants was 27 (28.12%). 47 students (48.96%) opposed the fact that distance learning allows them to better assimilate the material. Only 19 students (19.79%) voted in favor of distance learning in this matter. A large number (30 students (31.25%)) made up the group of those who found it difficult to answer this question. Thanks to distance learning, 45 students (46.88%) will be able to apply the acquired knowledge in the future. The number of those who disagreed and found it difficult to answer was 16 (16.67%) and 35 (36.45%), respectively.

The results of the study showed that students generally do not mind learning foreign languages in a distance format. Our study revealed that a high percentage of the respondents (42 (43.75%)) agreed with the statement that the distance learning improves foreign language skills and is attractive for students. This approach to learning allows us to increase the effectiveness of educational processes due to a variety of practical activities, high dynamism associated with the flexibility of the choice of educational material and a variety of forms of educational and methodological support. However, according to students, the distance-learning format does not contribute to increasing their motivation and better assimilation of educational material. Based on the students' answers, we came to the conclusion that students should be "taught to learn". In modern conditions, it is no longer enough just to transfer knowledge to students, to analyze complex topics. It is necessary to teach them to systematically search for something new, to constantly update their knowledge, to use technology as a means to achieve the goal, for example, to learn a foreign language.

59 (61.46%) participants pointed to the quality of the training material presented in the course. Flexibility and convenience are the main advantages of online learning, such as the ability to access the lessons anywhere at any time, and to complete tasks at their own pace. A positive assessment of the possibility of personal interaction between the student and the teacher should be noted. That is, students are generally satisfied with the overall activity of teachers in the learning process.

As indicated in Table 2, most of the students noted that their main problem was technical difficulties with connecting to the Internet.

Another important aspect to consider is weakly self-regulation by students. 45 (46.88%) less self-regulated students imply a need for institutional support in motivating their learning activities to be able to achieve their learning goals.

In terms of students' better understanding learning material, many students (47 (48,96%)) reported that the distance learning does not help them to understand the material better. Probably, it is the absence of the usual schemes of pedagogical communication in the distance mode that hinders the adoption of such a format by some of the respondents.

7. Conclusion

The results of the analysis of the obtained data suggest that there are several issues that arose in the process of introducing e-learning with the use of distance learning technologies in the practice of teaching foreign languages in universities to students of non-linguistic specialties. The opportunity to teach a foreign language course in a distant way is not always attractive for students at Kemerovo State University. Another problem is the insufficient initial level of qualification of all participants of the educational process, which requires additional preparatory training.

In some cases, substantial restructuring and other painstaking efforts are necessary to create any opportunities for innovation (Godzhaeva et al., 2019a, b).

This article is an attempt to reflect on what else needs to be implemented those digital technologies in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the circumstances of distance learning. More research is needed to study this type of e-learning learning, and factors such as effective infrastructure and training of teachers and students to achieve the most effective learning outcomes, creating the necessary working conditions.

Integrated distance learning will unload classroom from routine activities and fill learning process with more creative types of assignments. In addition, distance learning does not contradict traditional forms of education, on the contrary, integrating with them, promotes a more versatile disclosure of the intellectual potential of students and allows individualizing the learning process.

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