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International Conference «Humanity in the Era of Uncertainty»**CONDUCTING CLASSES IN THE DISTANCE MODE UNDER
THE CONDITIONS OF UNCERTAINTY**Oksana Skobeleva (a)*, Galina Girenok (b), Maria Cherezova (c)
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kuprijanova07@mai.ru**Abstract**

The move to a distance learning education sets a number of tasks both before teachers of various disciplines and students to develop the most effective methods of interaction under current conditions. Foreign language classes have their own features and involve the search for new ways of the educational process design to increase its effectiveness. Teaching methods developed for conducting classes using Zoom, the Internet resource www.quizlet.com, eLearning environment of the Institute were aimed at solving the problems that arose when moving to the distance mode. The theoretical and methodological analysis and generalization of topical studies on the research problem were used. The experimental training was carried out at Samara Law Institute of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. As additional research methods we used the observation method and statistics of student progress, as well as oral and written surveys of students and teachers. Within the framework of the research, a foreign language-training module was developed that included a set of exercises and tasks to control phonetic, lexical, grammatical and speech skills. The results of statistical processing of empirical data presented by questionnaires, written and oral surveys showed that the use of the offered resources made positive impact on the process of mastering the material, gave a boost to self-control on the part of students and also provided the teaching staff with the opportunity to choose various forms of work with the students in the process of teaching the discipline “Foreign languages”.

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1. Introduction

Recently, because of succession of students' generations, the principles of presenting educational material have radically changed: audio and video content gradually began to replace the text in its usual format (educational, methodological materials in print format). In modern higher education it is difficult to find an academic course that wouldn't have a media component.

Under the conditions of uncertainty in the period of pandemic, more than ever, before university, teachers had to move completely to a well-known, but not so widespread mode of education by not using the classical, traditional methods and forms of working with a group (direct contact with the class). For most teachers such a rapid entry or beginning of distance learning (hereinafter referred to as DL) became a real stress in the "fight" against innovation. The question concerning the development of distance courses within a short time for specific audience that was not ready for online lessons came up. The teachers together with the students step by step had to integrate various services and tools into the learning process, adapting them to the urgent methodological goals and objectives: to choose the right content and tools for conducting online classes; to create the training materials based on their own developments and the content offered by online services. This also allows one to place them in eLearning environment (for example, the e-learning system 3KL Russian Moodle); to develop means of students' evaluation (formative and summative assessment); to evaluate the progress of students and in a timely manner taking into account online.

In the studies that were carried out directly within the pandemic, some scientists touched upon the problems of digitalization of the higher education in Russia (Perevalov et al., 2020; Serditova & Belotserkovsky, 2020). There were questions of future of the Russian education (Skrypnikova, 2020), management problems concerning the mass move to DL (Kalistratova et al., 2020), the issues of teaching humanitarian disciplines in the process of DL (Shilovich, 2020), topical issues of DL in a modern non-linguistic universities (Kulakova, 2020; Likhacheva & Bedenko, 2020).

According to paragraph 1 of Article 16 of Law "Concerning Education in the Russian Federation", e-learning is "the organization of educational activities using information contained in databases and used in the implementation of educational programs and ensuring its processing of information technologies. This includes technical means as well as information and telecommunication networks that provide transmission over communication lines of the specified information, the interaction of students and teaching staff". Distance learning technologies (hereinafter referred to as DLT) are educational technologies implemented mainly with the use of information and telecommunication networks via the indirect (at a distance) interaction between students and teachers. Nonetheless electronic or distance learning is interpreted by modern researchers in different ways. So, for example, E.S. Polat points to the form of education as a new system with its own specific subject of training, different from the traditional (classroom) teaching pedagogical technologies, that is not a modernization and certainly not a replacement for extramural studies (Polat, 2020). As previously noted by Weindorf-Sysoeva (2019) the fact that DL was not a form of getting an education turned out to be only half true: in the period of pandemic DL had to introduce everywhere, so that it became a reality not a myth.

The scientists paid much attention to the problem of DL of a foreign language in higher educational institutions even before the pandemic (Loseva et al., 2019), in particular the content and technologies of DL in higher educational institutions were considered (Yashina, 2019). Under the conditions of the current uncertainty an attempt to distinguish between the terms “e-learning” and “distance learning” was made (Kotlyarenko & Simonova, 2020). The issues of increasing the students’ motivation to learn a foreign language using distance technologies were also discussed (Tantsura, 2020).

2. Problem Statement

In our research we proceed from the claim that DL was the use of such methods and modern technologies in the educational process that would be the most effective ones for indirect learning (Medina, 2017; Simhachalam, 2015). In our opinion this mode of training gave an opportunity for all participants in the educational process without exception to teach again, improve their professional level and perfect themselves. For example, modern educational platforms offer a wide range of webinars, online courses for teachers to create their own online courses so that the material of lectures will be not boring for students, and the tasks for self-study become adequate. In addition, online resources are supported by tutors, system administrators, and a technical support desk in any higher educational institution.

As a part of the study teaching the discipline “Foreign languages” with the use of distance technologies was carried out on the basis of Samara Law Institute of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. The main task of DL in foreign language classes was to find the most effective methods of interaction with students in order to improve the efficiency of the educational process.

The 2nd year cadets (98 cadets) took part in the research. In the experimental group there were 32 cadets.

The pre-experimental test (in the form of questionnaires, written papers, oral interviews) was aimed at identifying the level of students’ knowledge based on the results of the last term that mostly was held online to understand the reasons for the decrease in motivation for learning and students’ progress in the process of DL as well as efficiency of the use of various forms of DLT in foreign language classes. Due to the fact that the discipline “Foreign languages” is not major at the Institute, the level of the students’ language competence turned out to be intermediate.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Will the level of the language competence of students improve in the process of using the developed teaching methods?

3.2. How will the use of the teaching methods influence the motivation of students?

3.3. Will the teaching methods promote the development of students’ self-control skills?

4. Purpose of the Study

Taking into account the immaturity of this problem in a period of uncertainty, the purpose of this work was to study the features of conducting foreign language classes in the distance mode. The hypothesis

– use of various forms of DLT in foreign language classes – will make it possible to build up interaction between students and teachers in an effective way for achieving good educational results.

5. Research Methods

In the study the following methods were used: the empirical study method (observation over the educational process, conversations with students, teachers), tests analysis, summative and formative assessment; fundamental research method (study of scientific literature, training programs, teaching-learning materials); mathematical methods (statistical data processing).

6. Findings

In the course of experimental training, foreign language classes were conducted via videoconferencing using Zoom. In order to achieve the tasks in the course of conducting the classes it was supposed that the exercises would be done in the eLearning environment of the Institute (hereinafter referred to as ELEI) and on the training Website www.quizlet.com on the Internet. During the lessons text files, audio files, media presentations were used. The formative assessment was completed by retesting. The control students' assessment was aimed at defining the level of students' language competence. The results of the control of both groups were presented in percentage correlation according to 4 grade scale of the students' language level development (excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory) and correlated with the results in the beginning of training (Figure 1). The grade point average on the discipline "Foreign languages" demonstrated that the progress of the cadets of the experimental group was higher (4) than that of the control group of cadets (3.8).

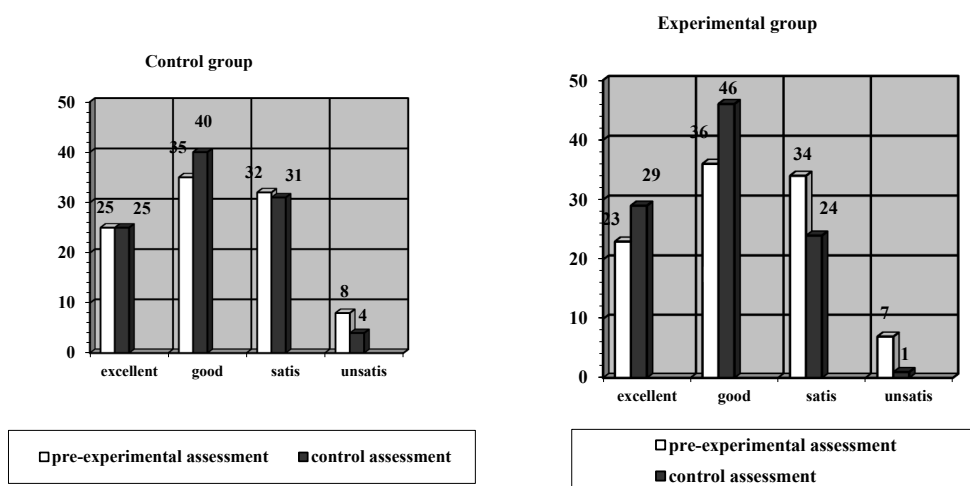


Figure 1. The percentage correlation according to 4 grade scale of the students' language level development (excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory) and correlated with the results in the beginning of training

In order to identify the most effective ways of interacting with students the following data were also processed:

– the questionnaire-based survey of the students during the experiment showed that 80% of them noted that the Quizlet platform made the process of learning any foreign language easy and more interesting. And 52% of the respondents answered in the affirmative the question “Will you continue to use this resource when studying a foreign language?”. 76% of respondents answered that Zoom and ELEI allowed exchanging the necessary educational materials (text, audio and video files). 57% of respondents expressed the opinion that ELEI allowed controlling the learning of the material independently (self-assessment tests, the possibility to view the results, errors and marks, read the teacher's comments on the tasks, draw up the schedule for learning the subject);

– an interview of teachers showed that among the advantages of learning the discipline “Foreign Languages” in the distance mode were the possibility of group and individual interaction with the help of Zoom (the same as learning a foreign language in a multimedia language laboratory). Creation tasks on the Internet resource www.quizlet.com allowed one to control the progress of each student and saved the teacher's time when studying, mastering and controlling the material. ELEI made the learning process more affordable and transparent (tasks database for the discipline, progress in their performance, the grade point average on the discipline).

The main reasons for reducing the motivation in the period of the pandemic were noted during the interview of cadets of Samara Law Institute: lack of face-to-face contact with the teacher, boring way of material presentation on the part of the teacher, troubled relationships in a family, laziness, the format of distance interaction in itself. A questionnaire-based survey (with multi-select) showed that the students' progress in the process of DL was changed because of: indirect interaction with platoon mates (13%), lack of organized (with the participation of a teacher and / or senior officers) self-training (32%), difficult material to study (41 %), lack of time to prepare for all types of classes (74%), beliefs about the meaninglessness of the subject being studied (7%).

6.1. Results and discussion

It should be admitted that DL is not a completely new form of education, never used in the past, merely the demand for it has grown over the period of the pandemic, and nowadays it is a widespread phenomenon. As a variant of extramural training with the use of DLT it has been used for a long time in many organizations, for example, in refresher courses, while testing the continuous assessment of cadets' progress, etc.

On the basis of the research it was assumed that DL had some clear advantages:

– low financial costs (on-the-job training, that is not required to pay the costs for transportation, accommodation of students, that in our opinion in future may become a real cincher for move of the extramural form of study to DL);

– universal accessibility (regardless of the student's geographical location and time);

– consideration for the individual pace of learning (the student sets the most comfortable pace for him taking into account all the circumstances);

- mobile interaction between the teacher and the student (24/7 feedback);
- search for the latest products, developments and findings for an effective learning process (search and introduction of advanced information and telecommunication technologies) (Shkoporov, 2020).

Among the disadvantages, we noted:

- weak structuredness of DL process (there are no standard requirements for conducting classes in this mode, each university has control over the list of resources involved in this process. But it is often the case that the teacher does it), so at the moment there is a fairly rich set of software products and complexes for online learning – Yurayt, Moodle, Zoom, MSTeams, GoogleDocs, etc.;

- teachers' resistance to modern technology concepts (fear and strong reluctance of teachers, mainly the older generation, to fail in the process of teaching because of the necessity to use new technical capabilities of DL systems);

- problems with accounting data safety (e.g., Zoom system vulnerability);

- teacher's dependence on helpdesk (at least at the stage of acquisition of the electronic learning resources, failure to ensure this interaction under current conditions in a mode close to 24/7);

- failure to conduct tutorials to the full extent that is a priori important for teaching foreign languages (all current systems do not allow to organize the team / group work of students in real-time mode; that fact was noted by the students during the survey);

- large energy costs on the part of both the teacher and the student (the process of total move to DL showed that much more time was spent on the preparation, placement, and check of educational materials on both sides than that if it happened in the classroom in face-to-face contacts).

In fact, as the practice of move to DL showed, the positive moment connected with the possibility for the student to set the pace of his work with the educational material turned out to be at the same time negative. The problem of the student's self-organization (self-motivation and discipline) was revealed. If in the full-time mode of study the teacher took on the role of the organizer of the learning process then in the distance mode not all students were able to take on this role.

7. Conclusion

Summing up what has been said, it is necessary to stress that in the process of conducting foreign language classes in the distance mode, the most effective ways of interaction with the students were identified. The applied online resources ensured an increase in both the motivation in the process of language learning and implementation of the educational function. On the basis of experimental training, we came to the conclusions that the use of Zoom, the Internet resource www.quizlet.com, ELEI promoted more effective learning of the material. There is a growth of the interest to the topics for discussion and learning, development of cadets' self-control skills, set of their own pace of work and building of interaction between the teacher and the student in a mode close to face-to-face contact in the classroom.

These results can be used for conducting foreign language classes at non-linguistic higher educational institutions in accordance with the main trends in the period of transition to a digital mode of education when training highly qualified specialists.

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