

LATIP 2021**International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm****DISTANCE METHODS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN
RUSSIA: PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL ASPECTS**

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Abstract

The research is devoted to distance methods of foreign language teaching in the Russian Federation. The study aims to survey both theoretical and practical aspects of the problem, to demonstrate their advantages and disadvantages. Research has shown that distance methods of foreign language teaching in Russia occupy the position between full-time and correspondence training. However, they have their peculiar features, such as flexibility, asynchrony, coverage, profitability, parallelism, modularity, etc. Special attention is paid to the role of the teacher in the distance teaching process. The components of the course of studies during distance foreign language teaching are studied. Requirements to be taken into consideration before creating a course of studies are highlighted in the paper. The evolution of teaching foreign languages at a distant mode in Russia is surveyed. The pros and cons of different methods are analyzed, including a communicative, direct and combined ones. Various psychological approaches lying at the basis of methods of distance foreign language teaching are highlighted. They are cognitive, behavior psychology and inductive-conscious ones. New systems of distant education that are used on the regular basis within Russian educational establishments, such as Mass Open Online Courses, Universarium, Open Education are surveyed in the paper. The opportunities of technological platforms for automation of educational process and assessment of students' works are discussed. The results of the study can be implemented in further development and improvement of methods of distance foreign language teaching.

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1. Introduction

One of the most actively discussed issues nowadays is the problem of distance teaching and learning. Obviously, the most powerful tool in this respect is the Internet. Opinions and views of expediency and appropriateness of such form of education can be absolutely different and sometimes completely opposite. In our opinion, it is normal, especially if we take into consideration that until recent years any method of teaching which gave at least a part of the volume of educational material to the students for self-learning was considered to be a distant method of teaching. Distance teaching (DT) is now considered to be a closed loop system, the Internet being the main means of information transmission. Web technologies that were developed in the 20th century have become the medium where distance learning has integrated naturally and effectively not excluding such opportunities as email and other options. In the Russian Federation distant learning occupies the position between full-time education and correspondence training. At the same time, it is a unique phenomenon which is different from both mentioned above. A specifically designed system should provide a comprehensive set of tools able to give the opportunity to be educated individually, to ensure information support in accordance with the curriculum, testing and self-testing as well as the system of ready-made final tests.

2. Problem Statement

- The pandemic situation around the world and within Russian educational system makes clear that traditional forms and methods of teaching do not satisfy the learner needs in educational services which are usually concentrated in big cities. The only way out is the transformation of the existing methods of teaching and the search for new ones. Past research (Boyko et al., 2020; Burlakova et al., 2021; Ivashevsky et al., 2021; Oberemko et al., 2021; Romanova et al., 2021; Tsiulina et al., 2021) speaks in support of this idea One of the options is definitely distance teaching (DT). It is becoming more and more important during our age of information technologies which can provide a completely new level of availability of education and preserve its quality at the same time.

3. Research Questions

The introduction of DT faces a lot of obstacles. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze its positive and negative aspects. Moreover, it is reasonable to survey DT from both theoretical and practical sides. Teaching methods and techniques as well as distinctive features of Russian DT should be observed.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of our work is to search for and to analyze the existing forms of distance teaching for practical use in the process of foreign languages teaching. The object of our research is the system of distance methods for foreign languages teaching in Russia from both theoretical and practical points of view. In our research we survey distance education as one of the forms of teaching. As a result, we are going to solve several problems:

- To study the existing notion of distance education in Russia as well as to assess its advantages and disadvantages
- To survey and summarize the existing concepts and practical models of distant foreign languages teaching methods implemented nowadays.
- To analyze the systems of distance education in the Russian Federation.

5. Research Methods

In our research we implement descriptive data analysis as it allows one to get more in-depth understanding of the problem of DT and to survey and analyze its failures and success without any influencing.

6. Findings

To start with, we should mention that there are numerous definitions of distance education, but the essential thing is that a teacher and a student are physically separated by the distance. This distance can be overcome by communication with the help of various information technologies. In the Russian Federation DE is not synonymous to correspondence courses because DE implies the students' constant contact and interaction both with the teacher and with other students. It also presupposes the simulation of all types of in-class education but via specific forms. We often see that the terms distant education and distance teaching are exploited as synonyms in special literature and research papers. Their blending also leads to the similarity of abbreviation- DT. However, let us distinguish between them. Teaching is an intentional, targeted and organized process of interconnected activities of a student and a teacher. Education can be defined as the result of the process of teaching, upbringing and developing the personality of a student. It can be classified according to the purpose (general, special, etc.), to the level (elementary, secondary, higher), to the specific field (humanities, natural sciences, etc.), but not according to the physical distance between a student and a teacher. We strongly believe that the term distance teaching (DT) is more accurate if we speak about various methods and approach. DT is a form of obtaining education alongside with full-time education and correspondence courses. It uses the best traditional and innovative methods, means and forms of teaching, based on computer and telecommunication technologies.

The basis of DT is the targeted and controlled intensive autonomous work of students which can take place in comfortable environment, according to individual schedule, having all the necessary facilities and the coordinated opportunity to contact the teacher via the phone, email and usual post as well as in person. There are some studies that are devoted to these issues. The following works (Dmitrichenkova & Dolzhich, 2020; Danilina et al., 2020; Maximova, 2020; Malakhova & Bykhtina, 2020; Ponomarenko, 2020, Vavichkina et al., 2020; Zlobin et al., 2021) should be noted. It is important to mention that DT functions according to the principles of humanity claiming that nobody can be deprived of the opportunity to obtain education for the reasons of poverty, geographical or temporary isolation, social insecurity and the lack of opportunity to attend an educational establishment for reason of physical disability or industrial employment. DT has naturally integrated into the Russian educational system as

the most promising, synthetic, humanistic form of obtaining education due to its ability to absorb the best features of other educational forms.

In general, international practice knows two basic forms of DT. Within the Russian Federation they are defined as American and British. American one implies full-time education with the help of telecommunication. It presupposes mediated interaction of a student and a teacher in real time mode or in the mode of later review. British system is called correspondence courses. It is the situation in which a student and a teacher are separated by the distance and the process of learning goes on mostly autonomously on the basis of ready-made teaching materials. It is very similar to part-time education. In Russia DT is viewed as the process of obtaining knowledge, formation of skills by creating special educational environment which is based on information and communication technologies, which provide the exchange of educational information at the distance. It implements the system of support and administering of educational process. DT in Russia is a completely new and independent system with its purposes, contents, methods and organization forms and means of education (Ogannisyan et al., 2020). In our research we can highlight several specific features of DT.

The first one is flexibility. Students do not have to attend regular classes, lectures and seminars. Each student can study according to their personal needs necessary to master a course or a subject, and obtaining the necessary volume of knowledge to get a chosen qualification.

The second feature of DT in Russia is its modularity. The principle of modularity is integrated into the DT curriculum. Each separate subject or a set of subjects which has been mastered by a student creates a wholesome understanding of a definite subject field. It gives the opportunity to make a comprehensive plan consisting of independent study courses to cover the students' individual or group needs.

The third feature of DT is parallelism. Education is carried out in-service. It gives the opportunity to combine work with studies.

The next one is asynchrony. It means that in the process of education a student and a teacher can implement the technology of teaching and learning independent of time, according to their own schedules and comfortable pace of work.

The next feature is called action-at-a-distance. The distance which exists between the location of an educational establishment and the student is not an obstacle anymore to obtaining the desired education. The size of the country is huge and this was a great problem some time ago.

The following feature is coverage which is also called mass character. The quantity of students at DT is not a critical parameter. They have access to various sources of educational information, such as e-libraries and databases. They can also communicate with each other and with the teacher via social networks.

Profitability is also one of the main features. It is regarded as economic efficiency of distant education (DE). The average estimation of Russian distant educational systems shows that they are at least 10-20 % cheaper. It is due to more effective use of the existing training areas and technical means of education as well as presenting educational content in a more concentrated and unified form and orienting the technologies of distant teaching towards a bigger audience of students and other factors.

A teacher plays one of the major roles in distant education processes. Teachers have a new responsibility as tutors. They have to coordinate the cognitive processes, to correct the course of studies, to consult, to lead the educational projects. Cooperation and interaction with students is conducted mainly asynchronously with the help of email and social networks (Nikitina et al., 2020) Face to face contacts are also possible. Students have to transform their usual mode of work using IT.

The components of course of studies at distant teaching should not be overlooked. The course of studies in Russian educational establishments is carefully planned and organized. It includes:

1. general information about the course;
2. its aims and purpose;
3. the problems to be solved with the help of the course;
4. the content of educational material;
5. the structure of the course in detail;
6. enrollment requirements to the course;
7. the content of entrance and final tests;
8. the condition of subscription;
9. the requirements to get access to database containing reference materials according to the subject course;
10. special questionnaire blocks which help the teacher obtain information about users;
11. the curriculum of the course itself which is well-structured according to educational modules and including multimedia components, such as animation, videos, etc.;
12. task modules aimed at training and knowledge acquisition;
13. tasks aimed at comprehension control;
14. tasks aimed at developing creative abilities;
15. tasks aimed at developing self-teaching abilities;
16. tasks aimed at developing practical skills and solving real problems;
17. tasks for making individual and group projects;
18. practical tasks for individual and cooperative work;
19. special materials aimed to control students' individual work;
20. database of FAQ and answers, email database for quick interaction of students- teacher or teacher- students;
21. special database of educational materials for interaction via email;
22. a forum providing cooperation of students;
23. special tasks for forum work with students;
24. a list of WWW addresses which are related to the course of studies;
25. anonymous register book with students' grades;
26. Internet page for current announcements;
27. special means for audio and video conferences.

There are several requirements to be taken into consideration before creating a course of studies. A lecturer-developer should:

1. specify the opportunity to use the already existing resources of DE;

2. clarify and to think over the system of interaction between students and a teacher;
3. determine the ratio between traditional and distant method conceptually.

Special attention should be paid to teaching methods at DE. Methods of teaching foreign languages have survived a lot of difficulties in search for optimal ways of forming effective direction in their developing. A very active methodology search for solutions in the sphere of foreign languages teaching which continues until nowadays has started at a definite point with the development of progress in Russia. It should be noted that the formation of a comprehensive method comprising the best elements of various techniques including the techniques of distant learning began to shape. The method of distant teaching is the youngest one so far. These techniques have not been actively implemented in the sphere of foreign languages teaching. There are different radio and TV programs, newspapers and magazines, correspondence courses for foreign languages learning for those who wanted to study them and to master their knowledge in this field especially if students did not have the opportunity to attend courses and to interact with the teacher face to face even in 1970s. Meanwhile, effective techniques for distant foreign languages teaching continued. The opportunities of TV, video and the Internet were more widely implemented in 1990s. Nevertheless, no comprehensive method of foreign languages teaching existed and its appearance was closely connected with a lot of factors and, first of all, with the systematic feedback with an experienced teacher. Nowadays computer and telecommunication technologies are a great means of assisting in this sphere in the Russian Federation. Several advantages of this form of education should be highlighted. They are as follows:

1. Students, who did not have the opportunity to study foreign languages due to lack of special educational establishments or a great distance to them, have this opportunity.
2. Prompt delivery of information at huge distances.
3. Flexible schedule of studies is a great benefit of DE.
4. This educational form expands the opportunities to access the necessary sources of information, to transmit it, to accumulate and to save it.
5. It enables to organize various interactive telecommunication conferences, to participate in such conferences.
6. It gives an opportunity to communicate with native speakers at a distance.
7. It enables to communicate with teachers at a distance.
8. It enables to teach great numbers of people.
9. It enables to create a unified educational environment.
10. It reduces training costs because there is no necessity in rental of premises.
11. The quality of training increases due to the opportunity to access the necessary databases and e-libraries.
12. Simulation and manager games are used as effective teaching tools at DE.

However, DE foreign languages teaching methods in Russia have several drawbacks. They influence the position of these techniques among others in this sphere. We can identify several disadvantages. They are as follows:

1. Not everybody has the proper access the technical means of communication.

2. A lot of distant localities have volatile internet connection which definitely influences the quality of education obtained.

3. The forms of academic control are not perfect.

4. Teacher training educational establishments do not prepare specialists in the field of DE. As a result, teachers have to upgrade their qualifications and improve their skills at special courses and sometimes by themselves.

5. Teachers are not psychologically ready to teach distantly.

6. Legal and regulatory frameworks of implementing DE are not well-developed.

7. Courses for DE should be developed. There are few of them nowadays and they are provided by leading universities nowadays.

8. Courses of study are not qualitatively drafted.

According to our survey, some other factors of distant foreign languages teaching in the Russian Federation must be taken into consideration. They are as follows:

1. The materials for study courses must be scientifically correct and verified.

2. Teaching techniques must be pedagogically approved.

3. There must be effective feedback and interaction of students and a teacher.

4. There must be strong motivation for both a student and a teacher.

5. The course of studies must be organized according to levels. A student should have the opportunity to choose the module according to their level of knowledge.

6. The level of knowledge, the period of studies, the stages of language skills formation.

When we speak about DE teaching techniques, we should take into consideration substantive content and methodology sides of the program. We should also think about the special basis for distant foreign language teaching because we not only give knowledge to our students but encourage them to obtain knowledge, to search for the necessary information themselves in the process of learning activity. At the same time the principle of novelty in foreign languages teaching should not be overlooked. For instance, a range of various training materials of different content should be used and teachers should refuse from mere making their students learn everything by heart. All these contribute to the development of language skills. Distance teaching methods certainly differ from other techniques but their principles are very similar since the communicative principle remains the main platform for their functioning.

It should be stressed that due to specific features, distant teaching in the Russian Federation is becoming a separate phenomenon in respect of methods. It is gaining a leading position right now because of the lockdown situation, getting more perfect at the same time. On September 1, 2013, the e-learning law was introduced in the Russian Federation. Later a lot of discussion has been going on in mass media about the possibility of using distant learning educational technologies in ordinary educational process at higher educational establishments. However, a special Internet school called Enlightening has been functioning in the Russian secondary education environment since 2000. Several regions of the Russian Federation have tested this system and pointed out the growth of teachers' interest to innovative techniques as well as the desire to improve their qualifications and even to be retrained.

One of the essential things in education in Russia has always been a teaching approach. It presents the viewpoint on the essence of the subject to be taught. It is the most common methodological basis for

the definite sphere of knowledge, it defines the strategy of methods of foreign languages teaching and the choice of appropriate techniques to realize this strategy. Methods of teaching are the tactical model of educational process.

Nowadays communication and activity approach is considered to be optimal and is regarded as the theoretical basis for creating a contemporary system of teaching foreign languages at distant education. In our opinion, communication and activity approach is very effective and has several advantages. They are as follows:

1. A student as the subject of education activity is the central target of educational process.
2. This system of education takes into consideration individual peculiarities of students, their psychological, age and national characteristics.
3. The active character of teaching presupposes a very strict organization of educational process targeted at stating and solving a definite educational problem by the students.
4. The object of teaching is speech activity in all its aspects, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing.
5. The main attention is paid to the formation of the need to communicate in a foreign language and to support this need with the help of professionally significant and culturally important information.
6. Communication and activity approach implements the main requirements to the contemporary educational process, such as communicative behavior of the teacher in class, the use of exercises reconstructing real and significant for the students' communicative situations, simultaneous acquisition of grammar rules, forms and their specific function in speech.
7. It takes into consideration individual features of students.
8. It realizes situational character of educational process as a means of stimulating speaking activity and as a way to develop speaking skills.

However, at DE there is an opportunity of using methods, principles and techniques of the behavior psychology approach when mastering a foreign language occurs by forming automatic speech patterns as a response to incentives offered.

Moreover, inductive-conscious approach can also be implemented at DE because mastering a foreign language occurs by observing speech patterns which leads to acquisition of language rules and the ways of their implementation in speech. For instance, with the help of special games aimed at learning lexis and grammar, during multiple listening to the texts and poems with a concentrated content of special lexis and grammar constructions, watching special educational videos.

The next approach to be mentioned as one of the leading in the Russian Federation is a cognitive one. It implies the conscious mastering of foreign language skills in sequence from rules and instructions to speaking skills on the basis of knowledge obtained. This approach can be implemented during the development of course of studies in relatedness with basic rules, creative tasks and exercises aimed at individual work, or for additional work for students who are interested in profound knowledge of a foreign language and whose individual psychological peculiarities demand the cognitive approach to both teaching and learning.

With such an integrated approach to DE it is expedient to speak about a combined method which comprises the principles of several methods:

1. A communicative method which, in its turn, has some basic principles, such as speech orientation of teaching, systematic character, functionality, situational character, novelty, intuitiveness in combination with conscious language acquisition, parallel mastering of all speech skills, speaking advance.

2. A suggestopaedic method which lets release the memory reserves, increase the intellectual activity of a person, develop positive emotions, reduce tiredness and increase the motivation of students. All these contribute to a great rise in the bulk of educational material assimilated at a time unit, to the formation of stable speech skills and to the ability to be engaged in various speech situations.

3. A direct method which aims at teaching practical language skills, at a starting stage in oral forms mainly. The choice of lexis is conditioned by conversational topics within the curriculum, by a very well developed system of phonetic drills which help to effectively master the sound system of a foreign language. This method also uses visual aids as a means of semantization of foreign language material. The use of reading and writing techniques contributes to consolidation of the new material. The use of technical means of teaching in Russia has led to the development of contemporary variations of the direct method. They are audiovisual and audiolingual ones which have been analyzed in our research paper (Nikroshkina, 2019).

Audiolingual method provides for multiple listening to and repeating the strictly chosen foreign language structures after the presenter which leads to their automatic use in speech. The lesson is organized in a definite succession: listening-speaking-reading-writing. The formation of speech patterns occurs with the help of exercises aimed at multiple repetition of samples. Speaking practice prevails over teacher's explanations and comments. Country study information is widely used during the lessons. Four main stages can be distinguished in the process of mastering foreign language structures: conscious choice of a new model and its contradistinction to the already known ones, training and practicing of patterns, free use of models.

Audiovisual method lets teach foreign languages in the shortest possible time on the basis of limited lexical and grammar material which is characteristic to the sphere of everyday communication. Moreover, oral form of teaching as well as intensive use of visual and audio aids prevail. The latter are used as the main means of semantization and activating of educational material. They are aimed at providing visuoauditory synthesis. The concept of method is based on the principles of globalism. It means that a sentence which perception and reproduction possess a holistic character is regarded as a unit of teaching. It is also based on the principles of oral advance, the absence of translation, situational character (foreign language material is introduced in the form of dialogs in typical everyday situations), functional character (the choice of foreign language material is based on communicative tasks). Foreign language material is presented mainly in the form of speech clichés. A new model of teaching has been developed within the framework of this method in the Russian Federation. It comprises four stages of foreign language knowledge acquisition. They are as follows:

1. Presentation. Global perception of educational material, intuitive mainly.
2. Explanation. Phased working through visuoauditory material. The aim is completely assimilate its content and sound synthesis.
3. Consolidation of knowledge. It implies the formation of automatic speech patterns.

4. Development. It means the formation of speaking skills on the basis of the knowledge and attainments obtained as well as fluent speaking on the topics which have been studied during the lessons.

As we speak about a short-term course, besides the communicative approach we should take into consideration its intensive character. However, the effectiveness of teaching is also very important. The use of technical means and programs help create a combined method including the technique of activation of inner reserves of a student, separate elements of didactic techniques aimed at intensive teaching with the help of activating a student's memory reserves, special techniques targeted at reducing stress levels during study process. The above-mentioned methods and techniques are mainly targeted at mastering foreign language speaking skills in the shortest possible time and at high daily concentration of academic hours.

It should be mentioned that all intensive teaching methods used in the Russian Federation are based on psychological reserves of students which are not used in traditional classroom education. Intensive methods of foreign language teaching in Russia differ from traditional ones by the means of organizing and conducting classes. Special attention is paid to various forms of pedagogic interaction, to the psychological and social atmosphere within the group, to the creation of adequate learning motivation, to the reducing of psychological language barrier during acquisition of language material in speech communication.

In our research new systems of distant education that are available in the Internet nowadays and that are used on the regular basis within Russian educational establishments are examined. First of all, it is MOODLE, the world's most popular learning management system. This system implements the philosophy of social constructionist pedagogy and is aimed at the organization of interaction between the teacher and a student, though it is also suitable for regular distant courses as well as for supporting regular full-time teaching. MOODLE courses are provided in numerous languages and are used in 197 countries of the world. This system allows Russian teachers to integrate the learning process into the web. MOODLE gives wide opportunities to organize seminars, tests, to keep a class log, to integrate various videos and links in the educational process. Thanks to module architecture, MOODLE can be easily expanded by third-party developers. A substantial expansion of functional possibilities of MOODLE is achieved by the integration of subsystems for organization of seminars and web conferences. Besides language support, MOODLE allows one to use some other types of modules, such as

1. Elements of courses
2. Administrator reports
3. Types of tasks
4. Authentication plugin
5. Blocks
6. Formats of courses
7. Course reports
8. Database fields
9. Plugins to subscribe to interactive courses
10. Evaluations
11. Assessment export formats

12. Assessment import formats
13. Portfolios
14. Types of questions in the test
15. Formats of export/import tests
16. Reports on tests
17. File repositories
18. Resource types
19. Search plugins

The second resource that is widely employed at Russian educational establishments is Mass Open Online Courses (MOOCs). They are presented by several educational platforms. The most famous ones in Russia are edX which collaborate with numerous foreign universities. Russian universities are not presented on it.

Coursera is the largest platform for online education. It was created at Stanford University. It offers the courses of flagship universities including the Russian ones.

Universarium is a Russian analogue of Coursera. It was created as a collaboration of several educational establishments. It gives an opportunity to get a high-quality education provided by the best Russian lecturers and flagship higher educational establishments.

Open Education is one more contemporary Russian educational platform offering online courses on basic subjects which are studied at Russian Universities. This platform was created by the Association of National Platforms of Open Education with the support of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Russian Federation.

TrainingWareClass is the first Russian system of distant education with an open code. It is a technological platform for automation of educational process and assessment of students' works. It provides interaction of a teacher and students in the process of education, creation and development of courses and texts, the support of full-time education. TrainingWareClass lets provide individual approach to teaching and automate a teacher's routine work. This platform was specially created to provide the needs of Russian educational system. Due to the scalability of solutions complex systems of automation of educational process and monitoring systems for local, regional and city implementation are created on the basis of TrainingWareClass. Participants of pedagogy societies can also create unified storages of educational and special training materials. These resources are already actively used for teaching foreign languages in the Russian Federation.

The next platform to be used in foreign languages teaching is Claroline LMS. It is a platform for e-learning and e-working which lets teachers develop effective online courses and manage the educational process as well as collaborative efforts on the basis of web technologies. This platform is very popular all around the world with both users and developers. It is an open source platform with the opportunity to administer the course online. Each course contains special tools that let a teacher do several things. For instance, describe the course, edit the materials, administer public and private forums, develop educational techniques, prepare students for online tasks, manage the agenda, edit announcements, provide information about current events and tasks, use wiki technology for making collaborative reports.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, it should be pointed out that distant teaching in the Russian Federation is a focused, result-oriented, interactive, asynchronous process of communication of the object and the subject of educational process. At the same time this process is indifferent to the distance bet process goes on in a specific pedagogical environment, which organic parts are the aims of educational process, the content, the methods of teaching, the means of teaching, organizational forms, economic, legal and regulatory elements.

The main purpose behind conducting this study was to review the contemporary approach to distance foreign languages teaching as well as to analyze the existing concepts and methods in the Russian Federation. It is worth mentioning that distance foreign languages teaching opens new opportunities in teaching and learning, broadens informational space and educational environment.

Distance foreign language teaching in the Russian Federation uses the most modern and effective methods of information exchange, demonstrates system and intersystem interaction, gives new mechanisms for realization of interdisciplinary relations as well as inter-scientific and social cultural connections. In our opinion, the information architecture of the environment that is constructed by distance foreign language teaching as well as the definition and the content should be defined more clearly.

It is also necessary to define the logical place of distance foreign language teaching in the higher and secondary education systems. Therefore, the environment of distance foreign language teaching in Russia should be optimized and legally regulated. Each participant of distance educational process should act within the framework of these regulations and information rights and duties, such as standards, laws, legal provisions, education requirements. Distance methods of foreign language teaching should also solve the problem of giving students the necessary tools not only to achieve their main goal to master a foreign language, but to teach students to find and use the means to solve any educational task and to feel the real results of their implementation. Distance education is a new step in the educational system of the Russian Federation.

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