Using Internet Resources for Remote Language Learning

https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i13.14653

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Abstract—Distance learning plays an important role in modern education, including the study of foreign languages. In this regard, the objectives of this study have been formed. Namely, to conduct a survey among university students on the topic of remote learning of the English language. Based on the obtained results, the conclusions are drawn, possible problems are formulated and recommendations are given that can help eliminate shortcomings in the remote English language learning. A total of 650 students from Chinese and Russian universities in their fourth year participated in the survey. The survey consisted of nine questions. As the results of the study show, students have a positive attitude towards distance English learning, but consider it insufficiently represented in their educational institutions. To solve this problem, several options are proposed: popularizing distance learning of foreign languages, explaining the importance of informal methods of distance language learning, and creating online language forums based on educational institutions.

Keywords—Distance learning, Self-regulated language learning, English-teaching; modern education.

1 Introduction

One of the main reasons for the emergence of distance learning is to ensure equal access to education for all citizens, including those who do not have sufficient resources to receive conventional education on campus in an educational institution. For this reason, distance learning is considered a more democratic form of education, since it aims to cover all social classes [1], [2]. However, distance learning methods have been criticized for their lower quality and effectiveness compared to full-time education. This criticism is still relevant today, although research studies have not revealed significant
differences between distance and full-time courses in terms of the effectiveness and quality. However, some studies even conclude that distance learning models are more effective than traditional on-campus learning models [3].

Distance education was developed as a result of techno-social changes in society. In addition, the practice, philosophy, and culture of people-developers have an impact on how a course is developed and conducted. Thus, the philosophical, epistemological and pedagogical aspects, in addition to the used technologies, have shaped the design and conduct of distance learning courses. Each generation of distance education developed in accordance with the pedagogical basis and technological innovations of its time. It is generally accepted to observe the harmony between pedagogy and technology in the field of distance learning, since distance education is heavily dependent on communication technologies to bridge the geographical and time gap between students, teachers and learning resources [4]. The computer played a significant role in the second and third generations of distance learning, while in the fourth generation its influence was crucial, providing a wide variety of educational programs for distance learning via the Internet. This change also created a new learning context that is an interconnected student community, rather than an isolated series of individual students [5].

There is a long list of e-learning models that have been developed to engage students in meaningful tasks, provide quick feedback, allow for discussions with teachers and peers, create a community of teachers and students. The main characteristics of the models are clear learning outcomes in terms of the subject or skill to be studied, the teaching method. The role of technology is to simulate the process and automatically present tasks that are carefully evaluated for complexity [6]. All these models reflect that social interaction is important in distance education to support effective learning. Therefore, direct communication has been modeled when developing training systems based on technologies such as audio conferences, video conferencing, and computer communications that can support two-way communication between students and teachers [7].

With recent advances in technology, teaching and learning a language are no longer limited to classrooms. Most non-formal learning takes place outside the physical boundaries of language classes. Non-formal learning, defined as “learning from everyday life activities related to work, family or leisure”, refers to the growth of lifelong learning, where students are portrayed as autonomous social agents who are actively seeking learning tools, resources, and opportunities available in their environment [8], [9]. Interest in learning languages through distance learning formats has grown markedly as a direct result of the expanded use of the Internet and a real explosion in social networks and computer communication [10].

Technological advances also mean that students’ literacy environments have become very social, interactive, and multimodal [11]. Various resources compete for student attention as soon as students go online. Since multitasking and lack of student attention are the norm in the digital age, the question of how best to describe informal extracurricular language learning in these virtual spaces remains relevant. One of the important virtual spaces is, for example, YouTube [12].

English is perhaps the most widely spoken international language as a result of globalization. Therefore, having good English skills is very important for many people. In
recent years, the rapid growth of wireless networks and mobile devices has made learning English in the context of mobile learning more and more popular [13]. Students' cognitive styles affect their learning performance in a technology-supported learning environment. Cognitive style reflects a person’s unique personality in cognitive activity, and it may not be related to human intelligence. Most people constantly use a special method when solving problems or obtaining external information. When students with different cognitive styles use technology-supported learning tools to help them learn, they demonstrate different learning efficiencies [14].

Talented teachers have always been actively striving to provide their students with maximum opportunities for collaboration. The same applies to the digital age, and to the variety of distance learning formats. Language teachers can now create the same opportunities for interaction in the context of online communication, whether in real time (synchronously) or with delayed time (asynchronously). Online language training includes email, discussion forums or ad boards, blogs, chatting with or without audio/video. The potential benefits of collaborative exchanges, whether in the classroom or online management, as always, are more dependent on the correct pedagogical plan of the tasks that the participants must complete, and not on the actual location of the training event [15]. Lesson planning by a teacher remains a must for best technology use [16].

Thus, distance technologies play an important role in learning a foreign language. In this regard, the objectives of this study are formed:

- Conduct a survey among university students on the topic of distance English learning
- Based on the results, draw conclusions and formulate possible problems
- Give recommendations that can contribute to the elimination of shortcomings in the system of distance English learning

2 Method

2.1 Research design

To conduct the study, it was decided to organize a survey among students of Chinese and Russian universities. The survey consisted of nine questions. In eight of them, respondents were asked to choose one of two answer options, in the last - write down their own.

2.2 Participants

Based on the goals set, an empirical study was organized and conducted, which consisted of a survey of bachelor students from state universities. The survey was held among four universities. A total of 650 students took part in the survey, of which 68% were women and 32% were men aged 20 to 21 years (see Table 1). All students are full-time students. Purposive sampling was considered the most appropriate sampling method. Prior to the collection of data, a consultation was conducted with experts to
validate the questionnaire. Experts from the departments of communication and languages rated the questionnaire as an effective tool for the purpose of this study.

Table 1. Students who participated in the survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Field of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>GuangXi Normal University of China</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Tourism University of GuiLin</td>
<td>Foreign languages and intercultural communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Moscow State Institute of International Relations</td>
<td>Translation, linguistic studies and intercultural communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Moscow State University</td>
<td>Foreign languages and regional studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 The criterion for selecting participants

The survey was conducted among fourth-year students. The criterion for this selection is explained by the fact that at this stage of training, students have already completed most of the special courses in their specialty, completed practical tasks and training. They have more experience in learning foreign languages. In addition, over a longer period of study, they are more likely to encounter various methods of distant language learning and form their opinions.

2.4 Research instruments

In the first question (Do you know the concept of “distance learning”?) the authors sought to find out whether the concept of distance learning is familiar to students. Indeed, in the conditions of the modern world, it is difficult to meet a student who would be unfamiliar with this concept. However, the authors have added this question solely for the purity of the research result.

In the next question (Have you ever encountered distance learning?), respondents were asked to report whether they had ever dealt with distance learning. This stage concerns not only learning foreign languages, but also using this method as such.

Further (Do you think that distance learning is more convenient than traditional classroom attendance?) students were asked to tell what type of education they think is more convenient. It will also help to some extent evaluate their attitude to distance learning methods.

Besides (Do you think that distance learning is an effective way to learn English?) they were asked to express their opinion on the effectiveness of distance learning methods.

Since students might also engage in self-education to a large extent, the goal of the next question (Have you ever resorted to remote foreign language learning by yourself?) was to find out if they ever resorted to distance learning methods. This will assess their desire to use modern teaching methods.

An important aspect of the use of distance learning methods is their use in universities in which students study. In the next question (Does your university use distance
education methods to learn a foreign language?), the respondents were asked to indicate whether such methods are used in their educational institution.

The purpose of the seventh question (Would you like distance learning to be applied in your university more?) was to assess how satisfied students are with the representation of distance learning methods in their institution.

In the penultimate question (Do you think your teachers support the idea of distance learning?), respondents had to express their opinion on whether their teachers support distance learning methods. Support from the staff plays an important role, since without it the development of distance learning will be impossible.

As mentioned above, in the last question, students were asked to write down their own options (What methods of distance English learning (including independent) can you name? You can list a few). The data on this issue will help evaluate how students are knowledgeable in distance language learning methods, as well as which of the non-academic options for self-education they consider acceptable.

2.5 Data analysis

When analyzing survey data, the STATISTICA system was used. This software, developed on the basis of Microsoft Windows, allows one to visualize data in statistical analysis. The error margin was 7%, about 30 questionnaires were incorrectly completed (some respondents did not answer all the questions in the questionnaire or chose more than one answer option).

2.6 Research limitations

Only fourth-year students took part in the study. All students study at the faculties of linguistic orientation. Moreover, the study is conducted exclusively in Chinese and Russian universities. This does not allow considering the situation in other countries’ universities, as well as non-linguistic specialties and other educational institutions (for example, schools and colleges).

3 Results

As expected, absolutely all respondents (100%) reported that they were familiar with the concept of “distance learning”. Such a result allows the authors to be sure during further research that all respondents are aware of what is being discussed in subsequent questions. The vast majority of respondents (98%) reported that at least once in their life they resorted to distance learning methods. This suggests that such a technique is quite common in Russia, allowing students to receive basic or additional education without being “tied” to the classroom.

According to the results of the next question, opinions were divided almost equally, 44% said that they considered distance education more convenient, while 56% would prefer to continue studying in the classroom. This indicates that, despite the sufficient prevalence of distance education, most students still prefer the traditional model, in
which it is necessary to attend classes, interact with the teacher, etc. Only 42% of respondents agreed that distance learning is a fairly effective way to learn English. One of the reasons for this result could be that when studying a language remotely, a student needs to be more independent and autonomous than in traditional classroom learning. This can complicate the work, especially in the initial stages. In addition, not all methods of distance language learning provide sufficient feedback.

A sufficiently large percentage (68%) reported that they resorted to distance English learning. It can be assumed that this percentage may be greater, since students may not perceive some ways of interacting with the language (for example, watching a video on this language or communicating with foreigners) as learning. Most of the respondents (80%) reported that distance learning methods are used in their educational institutions. This indicator can be considered positive, since it covers more than two-thirds of respondents. Besides, 83% said they would like distance learning methods to be more common at their university. This may indicate that, despite the applicability, language learning through distance methods is not implemented as often as students would like.

In the last question, respondents were asked to list their options for distance English learning, six main points were identified (See Figure 1).

According to received data, the most common answer options were online courses, applications/websites for learning a language, classes using Skype, as well as language conferences. From these results, it becomes clear that quite traditional, academic methods of distance language learning are the most popular among students. Least of all respondents mentioned methods that the authors included in a separate category - “entertainment”, which combined reading books or watching movies in English, watching videos on YouTube, reading articles on the Internet, etc. One of the reasons for the low popularity of this category could be the fact that students do not regard such classes as a way to learn the language, but rather consider them an application of already achieved knowledge.
Thus, the study of English by remote methods is quite popular, but still requires some adjustment.

3.1 Promotion of distance English learning

One of the reasons for the insufficient representation of distance English learning methods may be an incomplete understanding of their necessity. That is why it is necessary to popularize this direction and besides not only in higher educational institutions but also in schools, since the sooner education begins using distance learning methods, the more complete and familiar it will become for students.

3.2 Explaining the importance of informal ways to learn English remotely

Learning a language is a long and laborious process, which, ideally, should take place not only within the walls of an educational institution. That is why students should be aware that there are many ways to learn English on their own. For example, teachers can assign to watch any video on the Internet at home with its subsequent discussion or organize an individual reading course where the student selects a book and then writes a report.

3.3 Online forums for communication with foreign students

Online forums are among the most effective and convenient tools for online learning that improve the language level and stimulate cultural knowledge exchange. The university administration is responsible for the creation and organization of such a platform since this process requires certain material costs. Besides, teachers and methodologists who can give certain useful recommendations should be involved in the creation process. These forums may contain links to resources of interest to linguistic students, as well as video materials: lectures, seminars, training videos. However, in such forums, students can not only search for the information they need, but also communicate with students from other countries. This is especially important for students who do not have the opportunity to travel abroad or another way of applying language skills in practice. Discussion forums will allow students to develop their language abilities and share cultural experiences.

4 Discussion

Remote English learning is of sufficient interest, which is why studies are being conducted around the world on this topic. One of them took place in 2019 and was about learning English with the help of YouTube [17]. University students took part in this study, as in the current one, but in much smaller numbers. This study involved 20 university students (ten of each gender) from a wide range of academic disciplines (e.g., Chinese studies, applied foreign languages, business administration, education, production management and mechanical engineering) at two state universities in northern
Taiwan. Participants’ age ranged from 20 to 23 years, with an average age of 21.6 years. All participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method [18].

The interview based on “the position that participants' views are valuable and useful” [19], was adopted as the primary method of data collection, as it allowed for close interaction with participants to study issues of interest. In particular, semi-structured interviews were organized, because this approach with a flexible set of interview questions could help to understand why these students watched the instructional videos on YouTube in English and how they benefited from them. They were asked questions about the experience of watching videos in English, their goals of watching these videos, their attitude to them and the perceived impact of this informal educational approach on their educational experience and outlook on life [20]. Their answers were analyzed to give students an understanding of this improved learning strategy and its impact on learning English.

The results showed that the most striking goals of learning English on YouTube were the possibility to use various learning resources, finding attractive methods for learning English, and getting cultural knowledge. After watching a video on YouTube, students are more likely to click the like button and share the video with friends [21]. Moreover, learning English on YouTube was considered more flexible, interesting, and interactive than formal classroom instruction; however, this informal approach to learning was also considered less effective for students who wanted to improve their English or prepare for English exams [22].

The latest study highlights the pedagogical implications and suggests the additional use of YouTube videos for teaching English in the classroom. One of the main differences between this study and the current one is that it only considers one way to learn English remotely. In addition, this method is quite informal. The advantage of the current study is that it considers distance language learning as a whole and not one specific method.

5 Conclusion

In the modern world, distance education plays an important role, as it allows students to learn more resources for studying various disciplines, including a foreign language. To conduct the study, it was decided to organize a survey among students of Chinese and Russian universities. The survey consisted of nine questions. A total of 650 students aged 20 to 21 participated in the survey. As the results of the study show, students have a positive attitude towards distance English learning, but consider it insufficiently represented in their educational institutions. To solve this problem, several options have been proposed. The popularization of distance English learning, which should start already from school, since the sooner learning begins using distance learning methods, the more complete and familiar it will be for students. The importance of informal ways to learn English remotely should be explained, which will help students diversify their learning process. Online forums are among the most effective and convenient tools for online learning, which improve the language level and also expand cultural knowledge.
exchange. School-based discussion forums will allow students to develop their language abilities and share cultural experiences.

The developments and results of this article can be taken as a basis by other universities in China and Russia, as well as other countries, while conducting their own research on the importance of distance learning methods of a foreign language in the context of globalization. It might be of relevance for teachers and scientists of other faculties, since foreign languages are studied not only by representatives of linguistic specialties. In addition, a similar study can take place in schools and colleges.

6 Acknowledgement

The first author was supported by Project of National Social Sciences Foundation of China (No.19BYY098) and Innovation Project of Guang Xi Graduate Education (No.JGY2018020; JGY2019031).

7 References


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Article submitted 2020-03-09. Resubmitted 2020-04-07. Final acceptance 2020-04-09. Final version published as submitted by the authors.
9 Appendix 1

Questionnaire sample

Table 2. Student Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you know the concept of “distance learning”?</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you ever encountered distance learning?</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you think that distance learning is more convenient than</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traditional classroom attendance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you think that distance learning is an effective way to learn</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Have you ever resorted to remote foreign language learning by yourself?</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does your university use distance education methods to learn a foreign</td>
<td>Yes, No, not always.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Would you like distance learning to be applied in your university</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you think your teachers support the idea of distance learning?</td>
<td>Yes, No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What methods of distance English learning (including independent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can you name? You can list a few</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>