ORGANIZATION OF UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS USING DISTANCE SUPPORT IN SENIOR CLASSES

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Abstract: The article deals with the topicality and problems of using information and communication technologies in secondary education, conditions and methods for Ukrainian language learning with the distance support in senior classes. The article shows the principal similarity of distance learning to training one. It reveals the conditions of effective organization of Ukrainian language learning with distance support on the material of distance course “Business Ukrainian and Culture of Communication”.

Keywords: learning process with distance support, conditions of learning process effective organization with distance support.

ACM Classification Keywords: K 3.1.

Problems and topicality of distance learning in secondary school

One of the important existing problems that should be scientifically and practically solved while implementing distance learning in secondary school is the creation of curricula involving different forms of combination of face-to-face and distance learning, providing the ratio of individual and general learning programs, and usage of the network resources [Khutorskoi, A.V., 2001].

For this purpose, an experiment with implementation of Ukrainian language learning with distance support in senior classes is being carried out. The pilot distance course “Speech Culture and Business Ukrainian” was tested in April-May, 2005 (http://dl.kpi.kharkov.ua/techn3/tu196/DEFAULT.ASP?ukr), an improved course “Business Ukrainian and Culture of Communication” (http://dl.kpi.kharkov.ua/techn3/tu209/DEFAULT.ASP?ukr) was started in senior classes in Kiev in 2005-2006 academic year.

According to the result of the experiment, methods of organization of mother tongue distance learning process are one of the most complicated problems. The reason for this is not only the necessity to change the traditional organizational forms of work which is required under the conditions of increase of independent and individual work of learners, and the necessity to reduce the usage of explanatory and illustrative methods of teaching as well as to enlarge the member of practical and creative research works, but also because it is necessary to develop learners’ readiness to be rightful subjects of the learning process. Another difficulty in implementing distance learning support is the specific nature of the subject teaching itself: accentuated personal attitude towards the teacher and the subject, the necessity to work with a large quantity of text material, the peculiarity of the tasks that have to be done orally (when learners, pronounce something or speak out their opinions, etc).

The topicality of the research is also concerned with the fact that the experiments on usage of computer technology in the mother tongue learning process have not given unambiguous results. Some scientists [Attwell, P., 2001; Singleton, S. and Simmons, F., 2001] stress the positive effect of using computer programs for teaching reading and literacy, while the British Economic Society informs that the usage of informational and communication technology has not been useful for the development of learners’ basic reading skills.

Conditions of distance support organization
To achieve successful implementation of distance support it is important, in the first place, to design the learning process and only then to carry out its computer realization. It has not been done yet for the distance support of Ukrainian language (as the mother tongue) learning in the secondary school. The designing process includes the following:

1) creation of teaching materials for the distance course,
2) software,
3) organization of the distance support of learning.

The first two items are not reviewed in this article.

Describing the essence of distance support of learning, it should be noted that the results of psychological and pedagogical research for the influence of the information and communication technologies on the learning process have proved that the usage of these technologies lead to great changes in the contents of the learning process as well as in teaching methods and methodology that helps to make radical changes in the construction of teaching the subject [Mashbits, E.I., 1988].

Using this postulate as a basic as well as our practical experience, we have drawn a conclusion that designing and organizing the distance support in the mother tongue learning is very close to planning and organizing the training learning. In particular, the effective learning process organisation in distance learning is possible under the following conditions.

1. Firstly, it is necessary to formulate not only the general academic purpose, but also the purpose of each lesson. The peculiarity here, which distinguishes the teaching with distance support from the traditional learning, is that learners must form the purposes by themselves. Or it is also possible that they may also accept some purposes suggested by the teacher. In learning with distance support and in training the learners' need to know how their efforts would be rewarded is observed more deliberately. As a result of their activities learners should be said what skills and knowledge they would acquire at the lesson, how they might use them in practice, and the development of what skills they should especially pay attention to.

The methodological basis of distance learning is similar to the one of training learning in the fact that they both are aimed at the subject who really cares for the needed knowledge, skills, experience etc. Practice shows that the learners in senior classes do not have any definite purposes, which they want to achieve while learning mother tongue.

We must note here that the traditional learning does not allow learners to choose what they want to learn on their own. Hence, while organizing the learning process with distance support, it is necessary to form a new type behavior, when learners can make their own choice. For this, learners should be questioned before every lesson and there should be some summing up at the end of the lesson (a sort of feedback) to record the increase (or its absence) in every learner's knowledge and skills after each lesson.

Purpose formulation can be replaced by learners’ report about their expectations. These reports are important for the further work, even if the learners’ expectations are quite different to what the teacher planned to achieve. They can be saved written on the blackboard or paper, or in the network course.

2. At the beginning of learning, when learners are not able yet to plan their activities and formulate their learning purposes, the teacher/tutor has to substantiate his/her choice of learning purposes. Learners who participate in the learning process with distance support should know why the particular learning purposes have been chosen. Hence, it is essential to formulate general academic purposes so that the participants could see their topicality and importance.
It should be noted here that for learners (training participants) it is important to know if the knowledge and skills they already have are taken into account. For this purpose, the first lessons involve some preliminary tasks, including learners’ description of their work experience with the computer, software and Internet.

3. For distance support (like in training) it is important that students should realize how to achieve the chosen aims. So it is proper here to apply the required explanatory materials in a written or oral form to help learners get rid of fear and anxiety.

4. Distance support like training should have distinct division on the principle “beginning – middle – completion”. Besides, the usage of the distance course involves activity algorithmization, i.e. a part of learners’ actions are being repeated thought the course: checking e-mail, entering the course using a password and reviewing their marks and assignments for a lesson, etc.

It should be noted that the distance support unlike the classical distance learning, actually, does not allow students to choose time and pace of their work as it is restricted by lesson framework. But, as the assignments are given at the beginning of the lesson, learners can choose their performance tactic (in what order they should fulfill the tasks).

5. Though both the contents and the methods and techniques are equally important in a distance course. And the methods and techniques that have become classical (active on-line and off-line interaction) lose their effectiveness in distance support because of the presence of a real teacher directly. That’s why the questions and problem aspects in learning are not mediated with written messages, but are substituted with direct contact. For a number of reasons (loss of time, limited access to the Internet at school, etc), it has not proved to be effective to use mailing lists for problem aspects to be discussed, as well as personal home e-mails.

However, the interactive services like Mail, Forum and Chat can be used if they are placed along with the theoretical materials of the course and linked with the user identification. And in our case, they were widely used. It should be noted here that the application of the interactive services which are actively used by learners outside school (chats, forums) may bring changes in the subordination “teacher – learner” in written communication through these services. Similar change takes place in training and enables learners to the trainer as their equal. Though, some negative tendencies are observed in distance learning [Rockenbach, B., Almagno, S., 2000], such as aggression, usage of swear words, flames etc. This requires a teacher/tutor to know how to protect himself/herself psychologically and to be able to identify users.

6. Applying a network distance course allows a teacher/tutor to store teaching information as well as practical information and examples, based on students’ work. It is possible to correct and enlarge the course contents depending on the participants’ aims and expectations.

The course provides for a big quantity of didactic information for both categories of users (teachers and learners), such as glossaries and grammar references.

7. For Ukrainian language learning with distance support it is critical to develop a system of exercises involving speaking. Speaking activities are aimed not only at learning monological and dialogical speaking skills but they are a natural and effective way of experience exchange (and accordingly, of education and self-education). The methodology of the course with distance support also involves elements of psychological training (included on purpose) to influence communicative processes, school anxiety and learners’ lack of confidence. The researchers of foreign language distance teaching [Diomkin, V., Gulbinskaya, E., 2001] noted the disappearance of lack of students’ confidence that, according to the authors, prevented learners from showing their abilities during the lessons. To achieve this some psychological exercises and tasks were performed at the lessons to teach students interaction, work in teams, ways to resolve conflicts and so on. Such elements of a practical rhetoric as report, presentations, self-presentation, speech deliveries, etc have been used.
Since psychological elements have been included into tasks, being carried out in the distance course frameworks, as well as into the training tasks, it was supposed that the formed skills (with individual preference in different environments) would be transferred, accordingly, to the virtual environment for one learners and to the real life for other learners.

8. It is also necessary to develop a system of exercises to form a literately correct writing speech. Though, with the distance support, an interaction is mostly performed in writing, learners often use a hybrid of speaking and writing featuring simultaneously the elements of a public, dialogic and monologue speech [Voiskunskiy, A.E., 1991]. Their discourse is characterized by using shortened spoken forms, incorrect grammar constructions, chaotic dialogues, unnecessary emotions that hinder in understanding [Rozina, I.N, 2000].

9. The important and distinguishing feature of distance (as well as training) learning being an active process for the learner, not for the teacher/tutor, is being developed with difficulties at school lesson. The possible reasons for this are that learners do not possess enough psychological, personal, emotional, motivational and social readiness to use informational and communication technologies in their education and self-education.

 Though, it is only fair to admit that teachers (who do not directly deal with informatics and programming) are not ready to use informational and communication technologies at their lesson either. Though it is the level of teachers’ training that affects the quality of the lesson incorporating information and communication technology [Attwell, P., 2001]. The important thing is that using these technologies improves both teachers’ and learners’ work, the operational structure of their work; effects the motives of their activities, and greatly changes the system of participants’ relationship [Mashbits, E.I., 1988].

10. The essential thing in learning with distance support is that learners should have motivations to study (they should be able to see life perspective, formulate their goals, and plan their time, necessary to perform tasks and other activities); they should be ready emotionally to study (self-regulation, composure); possess personal readiness (behavioral and learning reflection and self-reflection, ability to distinguish between the new and previous experience, presence of a researcher’s attitude to the unknown, reflection and sensibility towards personal changes); learners should also have informational competence (moral fibre and lasting concentration of attention; ability to pick up the most important things from the message; to search, render and take notes on the information; to build the knowledge scheme on the studied language; critical thinking skills).

Conclusion

According to the results of the performed work we have come to the conclusion that:

1. The distance support is one of the desirable forms of distance learning implementation in the secondary school educational process as it helps to keep a balance between the standardized school learning and tendency towards individualized learning; it also can eliminate faults of technical equipment (and also errors in its work) though presence of a real teacher in the classroom.

2. A well-organized distance learning of Ukrainian language may be effective enough if the psychological and pedagogical peculiarities of construction and organization of this form of education are observed.

3. Due to the factors of activity and interactivity the learning with distance support can give relief to the traditional learning process where the reproductive learning method prevails.

4. In the methodology of Ukrainian language learning with distance support, it is required to remember that the communication, both direct and indirect, i.e. through technical environment, between the teacher and the learner remained significant for development of learners’ personalities rather than to be just a tool to receive the information on the subject.
5. It is necessary to develop such types of assignments within Ukrainian language learning that could be directed to a successful mastering the subject as well as to a development of learners’ personalities.

Bibliography


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