Effects of distance learning on English language learning

Tamar Dolidze*

Batumi State University 35 Ninoshvili str., Batumi, Georgia, 6010

Abstract

There is much information written about the benefits of Distance Learning on English Language learning. Advocates for integrating Distance learning into the English classroom emphasize the positive effects of Distance Learning. Computer usage in classrooms increases students’ amount of sedentary time and decreases their amount of active time. Physical activity keeps the brain active and focused so it is important for students to be physically involved in their learning. With the increased use of Distance Learning the physical aspect of learning is often neglected. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are thriving on the use of short snippets of information. Shortened forms of full words, and fully developed sentences and thoughts. Although these programs are not used in the academic writing, we have to recognize that students use these sites regularly, and it is dramatically changing the way we read and write. Though, studies showed overwhelmingly positive effects of Distance Learning on English Language Learning. It is important to note that the achievement of positive effects is the result of some common components.

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1. Introduction

There is much information written about the benefits of Distance Learning on English language learning. Advocates (supporter) for integrating Distance Learning into the English classroom emphasize the positive effects of Distance Learning.

Computer usage in classrooms increases students’ amount of sedentary (sitting) time and decreases their amount of active time. Physical activity helps to keep the brain active and focused, so it is important for

* Corresponding author. Tel: +00 000 000 0000; fax: +00 000 000 0000
E-mail address: tamunadi@yahoo.com
students to be physically involved in their learning. With the increased use of Distance Learning, the physical aspect of learning is often neglected.

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Though, studies showed overwhelmingly positive effects of Distance Learning on English Language Learning. It is important to note that the achievement of positive effects is the result of some common components.

Under the conditions of worldwide globalization and a tendency of Georgia to be integrated into the world community, the knowledge of English at high level becomes one of the compulsory requirements for any specialist in any field of human activities.

Nowadays in our country there are some examples of pure distance training of foreign languages specialized courses, where the stress is made on written English, which could be taught and is easy to be checked at a distance.

The peculiarity of our teaching is the fact that we combine face-to-face and distance learning during the learning process. It is connected with the different level of our students’ preparation and, correspondingly, the differences in their needs (speaking, studying grammar, development of listening skills etc.).

To teach beginners a lively talk, intonation, manners of concrete behavior is impossible without regular face-to-face contact with each other and the teacher. However, there are no developed methods and instructions for teachers about the combination of face-to-face and distant activities. That’s why the article is devoted to solving this question.

Developing methods for foreign languages teaching using e-support:

To study a foreign language fully while using traditional Distance Learning (DL), i.e. without face-to-face support, is practically impossible. The presence of live communication with a teacher and other students to receive maximum speaking practice is compulsory. While implementing the distance course into the foreign languages learning it was noted that learning spaces do not correspond to the specific demands for the learning process being made of foreign language teachers. Specific teaching features of this subject made us to widen the functions of the space used in learning.

The functions being performed now by the learning environment as e-support while teaching foreign languages:

1. Bulletin Board with the information about the homework for the next practical lesson, about the requirements to pass a credit or exam and other announcements;

2. Backed up materials of scanned pages from text-books to be uploaded and printed by students;
3. Providing audio files (*.mp3) with authentic foreign speech to be uploaded and listened. This allows students to perform all the listening tasks independently, at his/her speed, with as many times for listening as needed.

4. Training before e-testing using the developed interactive tasks for students’ self-control.

5. E-tests with unlimited or limited times for passing them. Students’ interest in being honest is provided by a face-to-face exam or credit at the end of the course (depending on the syllabus).

6. Informing students about the results of assessment according to the rating system;

7. Help while performing home task due to the presence of the built-in e-vocabularies on the web-site and links to the modern e-dictionaries in Internet;

8. Links to the backed up materials for additional home reading indicating the volume of the text in symbols and in megabytes.

9. Possibility for the teacher to replace additional Internet links on the web-site to organize students’ project work.

A question of current importance is:

Which of these activities could be performed individually by students, which could be performed in a face-to-face mode?

With a face-to-face support all kinds of students’ activity should be performed at the beginning of work with a learning space (the first two-three weeks of learning):

– Listening (to have discussions according to the materials being heard);

– Performing interactive tasks for self-control and training before passing the control testing;

– Testing (to provide students’ independent work without any help, to receive objective results).

At the same time students’ work using computer should necessarily take turns with oral communication to a teacher and other students. Our experience shows that the organizational difficulties appear during a face-to-face lesson if the teacher began it with the work using computers. After that students can hardly switch to face-to-face activities, i.e. working with different speed they cannot finish performing the computer tasks simultaneously.

That’s why the work using computers should be left till the final stage of a lesson.

For an independent students’ work, in fact, any practical activity can be put. However, it is possible only when the teacher is sure that all the students can log into the system and know what and where can be found on the web-site and how to work with it.

Practical Research Results show that the compulsory activity in E-learning was visiting face-to-face lessons and using some elements of DL (in particular, electronic testing).
The results of students’ progress in e-learning allowed us to draw a conclusion that it is necessary to use the elements of DL in teaching foreign languages. It is interesting for students, it allows them to control their success in learning better and easier, it improves students’ vocabulary in professional terms and improves their computer literacy.

Finally, distance learning

- Is very convenient, tests could passed any time and in any place;
- It helps to improve my knowledge of English;
- It helps to put into practice my self-evaluation;
- It helps teacher to put into practice the evaluation of students’ level;
- It saves teacher’s time on control implementing;
- It helps to get the additional skills of work using computers.

Our experience showed that even in groups with homogeneous participants in the level of English knowledge there are often students whose experience in using English does differ significantly from the experience of other students. That’s why the teacher, using e-support in teaching, should allocate the learning materials of different complexity levels, additional materials in grammar, listening, video and audio materials for student’s independent study on the web-site. Students’ additional activity can be not evaluated in the rating system of the course; however, it allows students who wish to study more to get an access to any necessary materials.

Hence, it is important to consider the students’ wishes, to elaborate and improve the testing system of the distance course. The necessity of individual approach to any learner requires considering all the wishes that students had, that’s why it is planned to add more additional text materials of various levels during Distance Learning.

References


