

oposición

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 36, 2020, Especial N°

27

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNe: 2477-9385

Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas
Maracaibo - Venezuela

Using Internet Resources in Remote Learning of English as a Foreign Language

Mona Kamal Ibrahim¹

¹Al Ain University, Al Ain, UAE
Email: Monosh2004@aau.ac.ae

Natalya A. Spitsyna²

²Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russian Federation
Email: spitsyna.na@dvfu.ru

Anastasia Y. Isaeva³

³Tula State University, Tula, Russian Federation
Email: isaeva_anastasia91@tulasu.com

Abstract

Remote learning plays an important role in modern education, including language education. Thus, the objectives of the research are: to conduct a survey among university students on the topic of remote learning of the English language; based on the results, to draw conclusions, identify possible problems and develop recommendations that can help eliminate the disadvantages of the remote learning of the English language. A total of 650 fourth-year students from Russian universities participated in the survey. There were nine questions in the survey. According to the results of the study, students have a positive attitude towards remote learning courses in English. However, they believe that this practice has not been sufficiently developed in their educational institutions. Several solutions were proposed to address this problem: promotion of remote learning of foreign languages; explaining the importance of informal methods of remote language learning; creation of online language forums under the auspices of educational institutions.

Key words: distance learning; internet resources; self-regulated language learning; English-teaching; modern education.

Uso de recursos de Internet en el aprendizaje remoto del inglés como lengua extranjera

Resumen

El aprendizaje remoto desempeña un papel importante en la educación moderna, incluida la educación en idiomas. Por lo tanto, los objetivos de la investigación son: realizar una encuesta entre estudiantes universitarios sobre el tema del aprendizaje remoto del idioma inglés; con base en los resultados, sacar conclusiones, identificar posibles problemas y desarrollar recomendaciones que puedan ayudar a eliminar las desventajas del aprendizaje remoto del idioma inglés. Un total de 650 estudiantes de cuarto año de universidades rusas participaron en la encuesta. Hubo nueve preguntas en la encuesta. Según los resultados del estudio, los estudiantes tienen una actitud positiva hacia los cursos de aprendizaje remoto en inglés. Sin embargo, creen que esta práctica no se ha desarrollado suficientemente en sus instituciones educativas. Se propusieron varias soluciones para abordar este problema: promoción del aprendizaje remoto de idiomas extranjeros; explicando la importancia de los métodos informales de aprendizaje remoto de idiomas; creación de foros de idiomas en línea bajo los auspicios de instituciones educativas.

Palabras clave: enseñanza a distancia; aprendizaje autorregulado de idiomas; enseñanza del inglés; educación moderna; recursos de Internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main reasons for the emergence of remote learning is the fact that all citizens are given equal educational opportunities, including those who do not have sufficient resources to receive

traditional on-campus education. For this reason, remote learning is considered to be a more democratic form of education; it aims to reach all social strata (Gunawardena and McIsaac, 2004; Kopnov et al., 2018). However, remote learning methods have been criticized for their lower quality and for being less effective compared to the intramural form of study; this criticism is remains relevant today, although research studies have not revealed significant differences in terms of the effectiveness and quality of education between remote and full-time courses. However, some studies conclude that remote learning models are more effective than the traditional on-campus ones (Ni, 2013).

Technological and social changes in society contributed to the development of remote learning. In addition, the practice, philosophy, and culture of people promoting open and remote learning have an impact on its development and implementation. Thus, philosophical, epistemological and instructional techniques, adopted in addition to the technologies used, formed the design of remote learning courses. Each generation of remote education was developed in accordance with the pedagogical basis and technological innovations of the time. It is generally accepted to observe the harmony between pedagogy and technology in remote learning: remote education is strongly influenced by communication technologies to bridge the geographical and time gap between students, teachers and learning resources (Saykili, 2018).

The computer played a significant role in the second and third generation of remote learning. However, its influence was crucial in the fourth generation to provide a wide range of remote educational

programs via the Internet. This change has also created a new learning context that is an interconnected community of students, rather than an isolated group of individual students (Farooq et al., 2012).

There is a long list of remote learning models that have been developed based on the student needs analysis in order to engage them in meaningful tasks, provide quick feedback, encourage discussions with teachers and peers, as well as to evaluate and create a community of teachers and students. The main characteristics of the models were clear learning outcomes in terms of the subject or skill to be studied, the teaching method. The role of technology was to model the process and automatically present the tasks that were carefully evaluated for complexity (Salmon, 2004).

According to these models, remote learning recognized the need to provide opportunities for social interaction to support effective learning and therefore tried to model direct communication through the development of educational systems based on technologies such as computer communications, audio and video conferences that can support two-way communication between students and teachers (Smith and Casserly, 2010).

Recent technological advances provide more opportunities for teaching and learning a language: non-formal learning takes place outside the classroom. Non-formal learning, defined as “learning from everyday activities related to work, family or leisure,” is associated with the growth of lifelong learning, where students are portrayed as autonomous social agents actively looking for learning tools, resources

and opportunities available in their environment (Stickler and Emke, 2011; Khasanova and Kotova, 2018).

The expanded use of the Internet and a real explosion in social networks and computer communication contributed to the growth of interest in remote language learning. Although remote learning relies heavily on previous studies in computer language learning, it also opens up other considerations specific to these new learning environments (Blake, 2009).

Technological advances also mean that the student literacy environment has become very social, interactive and multimodal (Kuure, 2011). Various resources also compete for student attention as soon as students go online. Since multitasking and lack of student attention are common in the digital age, the question of the best description of non-formal extracurricular language learning in these virtual spaces remains relevant. For example, one of the important virtual spaces is YouTube (Mokhtari et al., 2015).

English is the most widespread international language due to globalization processes. Therefore, good English skills are very important for most people. In recent years, the rapid growth of wireless networks and mobile devices has made mobile English learning more and more popular (Chang and Hsu, 2011).

Students' cognitive styles affect their academic performance in a technology-supported learning environment. Cognitive style reflects 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.

Technology-supported learning tools demonstrate different learning efficiency when used by students with different cognitive styles (Chen et al., 2016).

Talented teachers have always been actively striving to provide their students with maximum opportunities for collaboration. The same applies to the digital age and the variety of remote learning models. Nowadays, language teachers can create the same opportunities for interaction in the context of online communication both synchronously and asynchronously. Remote language learning includes communication via e-mail, discussion forums or bulletin boards, blogs, wikis, as well as audio/video communication. The potential benefits of collaborative exchanges, whether in the classroom or online management, are more dependent on the correct pedagogical plan to be completed by the participants rather than the actual location of the learning event (Kern and Warschauer, 2000).

The success of technology-oriented activities is likely to depend on their successful implementation before and after the events than on the technology-related activities themselves. In other words, lesson planning remains a prerequisite for best practice of using technologies (Salaberry, 2001).

It can be concluded that remote learning technologies are important for learning a foreign language. Thus, the objectives of the research are to:

- conduct a survey among university students on the topic of remote learning of the English language;

- based on the results, draw conclusions and identify possible problems;
- develop recommendations to eliminate the disadvantages of remote English learning.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

To conduct the study, it was decided to survey students of Russian universities. There were nine questions in the survey. The respondents were asked to choose one of the options given and in the last question they had to write down their own answer.

2.2. Participants

On the basis of the objectives set, an empirical study was organized and conducted. It consisted of a survey of bachelor students of state universities. There were 4 universities participating in the survey. In total, 650 students took part in the survey, of which 68% were females and 32% were males aged 20-21. All the survey participants are intramural students. The purposive sample was the most appropriate sampling method. Before data collection, the questionnaire was validated by experts. Experts from the departments of communication and languages rated the questionnaire as an effective tool for the purpose of the study.

Table 1: Students participating in the survey

Number of students	Age	University	Area of studies
177	20-21	People's Friendship University of Russia	Linguistics
198	20-21	Higher School of Economics	Foreign languages and intercultural communication
125	20-21	Moscow State University of International Affairs	Translation, linguistic studies, intercultural communication
150	20-21	Moscow State University	Foreign languages and regional studies

2.3. The participant's selection criterion

The survey involved fourth-year students. The selection criterion is due to the fact that bachelor students have already completed most of their special courses and practical tasks, as well as undertaken the internship. They have more experience in learning foreign languages. In addition, they are more likely to have encountered various methods of remote learning of a foreign language to form their opinions.

3. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

In the first question (Are you aware of the concept of “remote learning?”), we tried to find out whether the concept of remote learning is familiar to students. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to find a student who is unfamiliar with it; but for the accuracy of the results, it was necessary to make sure.

In the next question (Have you ever had any experience in remote learning?), the respondents were asked to report whether they had ever dealt with remote learning. The question is not related only to learning foreign languages, but to using this method in general.

Next (Do you think that remote learning is more convenient than traditional classes?), the students were asked to report which method they preferred. This could also assess their attitude toward remote learning.

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

As students can also be engaged in self-education, the purpose of the next question (Have you ever resorted to remote learning of a foreign language?) was to find out if the students have ever resorted to remote learning methods. This will help us assess their willingness to use modern learning methods.

An important aspect of the use of remote learning methods is their application in the universities participating in the study. In the next question (Are remote learning methods to learn a foreign

language available in your university?), the respondents were asked to indicate whether such methods are used in their educational institution.

The purpose of the seventh question (Would you like your university to develop remote learning?) was to evaluate students' satisfaction with the representation of remote learning methods in their educational institution.

In the next-to-last question (Do you think your teachers support the idea of remote learning?), the respondents had to report whether their teachers support remote learning methods. The development of remote learning is impossible without the academic staff support.

As it has already been mentioned, in the last question, the students were asked to write down their own options (What methods of remote learning (including self-directed learning) of the English language could you name?). It was possible to mention several options. The data obtained will help evaluate students' awareness of remote language learning methods, as well as the non-academic options for self-education which they consider acceptable.

3.1. Data analysis

The STATISTICA system was used to analyze the survey data. The Microsoft Windows-based software allows visualizing data in the statistical analysis. The margin of error is 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).

3.2. Research limitations

The survey involved only fourth-year students. All the participants are linguistics students. In addition, the study was conducted in Russian universities. This does not allow considering the situation in foreign universities, as well as non-linguistic specialties and other educational institutions (for example, schools and colleges).

4. RESULTS

As expected, all the respondents (100%) reported that they were familiar with the concept of “remote learning”. The result proves that all the respondents are aware of what is being discussed in subsequent questions.

Also, the vast majority of the respondents (98%) reported that they resorted to remote learning methods at least once. This suggests that remote learning is quite common in Russia, allowing students to receive basic or additional education without being “attached” to the classroom.

According to the results of the next question, the opinions were divided almost equally: 44% said that they considered remote learning more convenient, while 56% would prefer to continue studying in the classroom. This indicates that despite the prevalence of remote learning, most students still prefer the traditional model, which requires attending classes, interacting with a teacher, etc.

Only 42% of the respondents agreed that remote learning is quite an effective way to learn English. This result is due to the fact that when studying a language remotely, a student needs more independence and autonomy than in a traditional classroom. This can make the work harder, especially at the initial stage. In addition, not all methods of remote language learning provide sufficient feedback.

A sufficiently large percentage (68%) reported having resorted to remote learning English courses. It can be assumed that the percentage may be greater due to the fact that students may not perceive some ways of practising the language (for example, watching a video or communicating with foreigners) as learning.

Most of the respondents (80%) indicated that remote learning methods are used in their educational institution. This indicator can be considered positive as it covers more than two-thirds of the respondents.

Eighty-three per cent (83%) of the respondents said they would like remote learning methods to be more commonly used in their universities. This may indicate that despite the applicability, remote language learning is not implemented as often as students would like.

About half of the students (52%) reported that their teachers support the idea of remote learning of foreign languages. The result could be explained by students' dissatisfaction with the representation of remote learning methods. They can consider that one of the reasons for this is that the teachers are not sufficiently passionate about this idea.

In the last question, the respondents were asked to list their options for remote learning of the English language; there were six main points. For convenience, we presented them in the form of a diagram with a percentage ratio.

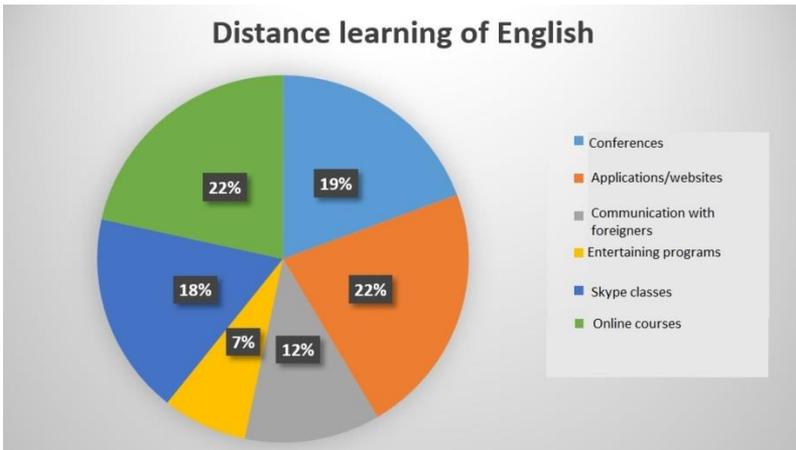


Figure 1: Ways of remote learning of English

According to the data received, the most common options were online courses, applications/websites for language learning, Skype classes, as well as language conferences. The results show that traditional academic methods of remote language learning are the most popular with students. The methods that we included in a separate category of “entertainment” were the least mentioned; they included reading books or watching films in the source language, watching videos on YouTube, reading articles on the Internet, etc. The unpopularity of this category could be explained by the fact that

students consider such classes as a product of existing knowledge rather than a way to learn the language.

Thus, it can be concluded that remote learning of English is quite popular, but it still requires some adjustments.

4.1. Promotion of remote learning of the English language

The incomplete understanding of the necessity of remote English learning methods may be one of the reasons for their insufficient representation. Thus, it is important to promote this direction. It should not be only done in higher education institutions, but also in schools; the sooner distance learning methods are introduced, the more complete and more familiar they are for students.

4.2. Explaining the importance of informal methods of remote language learning

Learning a language is a long and laborious process, which should take place not only in an educational institution. That is why students should know that there are many ways to learn English on their own. For example, teachers can ask students to watch any videos on the Internet with their subsequent discussion or organize an individual reading course where the student selects a book and then writes a report on it.

4.3. Online forums for communication with foreign students

Online forums are one of the most effective and convenient tools for remote learning, which allow people not only to improve the language level, but also to share cultural knowledge. The creation of such a platform requires certain material costs. Thus, this is the task of the university. The process should involve teachers and methodologists who can give certain useful recommendations. These forums may contain links to interesting resources, as well as video materials: lectures, seminars, training videos. However, such platforms allow students not only to search for the information they need, but also to 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 practicing language skills. Discussion forums will allow students to develop their language skills and share cultural experiences.

5. DISCUSSION

Remote learning of English is of sufficient interest: there are a lot of studies around the world devoted to this topic. There was a study that took place in 2019 and considered learning English by YouTube (Wang and Chen, 2019).

The study involved a small number of university students. There were 20 university students (10 males and 10 females) studying a wide range of academic disciplines (e.g., Chinese studies, applied foreign

languages, business administration, education, production management and engineering) at two state universities in northern Taiwan. The age of the participants varied from 20 to 23 years old, with an average age of 21.6 years. The selection criterion was based on the snowball sampling method (Kalaja et al., 2011).

The interview, which is based on “the position that participants' views are valuable and useful” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006), was adopted as the main data collection method as it ensured close interaction with the participants to study issues of interest. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted; the approach with a flexible set of interview questions could help to understand why students watched the instructional videos on YouTube in English and how they benefited from it. They were asked questions about the experience of watching videos in English, their expectations from watching these videos, their attitude to them and the impact of this informal learning approach on their learning experience and outlook on life (Reinders and Benson, 2017).

The answers were analyzed to get the understanding of the improved learning strategy and its impact on learning English.

The results showed that the most striking goals of learning English on YouTube were finding more educational resources and attractive methods for learning English, as well as getting cultural knowledge. After watching a video on YouTube, students are more likely to click the “like” button and share the video with friends (Richards, 2015).

Moreover, learning English on YouTube was considered more flexible, interesting, and interactive compared to traditional classes. However, this informal approach to learning was also considered less effective for students who wanted to improve their English or prepare for English exams (Tsuda and Nakata, 2013).

Based on the study results, the pedagogical implications are highlighted in conclusion and the additional use of YouTube videos for teaching English in the classroom is proposed.

One of the main differences between this study and ours is that it considers only one method of learning English remotely. In addition, this method is quite informal. The advantage of the present study is that it allows judging students' attitude to remote language learning in general rather than to one specific method.

6. CONCLUSION

In the modern world, remote learning plays an important role: it allows students to get more resources for studying various disciplines, including a foreign language.

To conduct the study, it was decided to survey students of Russian universities. There were nine questions in the survey. A total of 650 students aged 20-21 participated in the survey. According to the results of the study, students have a positive attitude towards remote learning courses in English. However, they believe that this practice has not been sufficiently developed in their educational institutions.

Several solutions were proposed to address the problem: Popularization of remote learning of the English language, which should start at school: the sooner remote learning methods are introduced, the more complete and more familiar they are for students. Explaining the importance of informal methods of remote language learning which make the educational process more entertaining. Online forums are one of the most effective and convenient tools for remote learning, which allow people not only to improve the language level, but also to share cultural knowledge. Discussion forums help students to develop their language skills and share cultural experiences.

The developments and results of the study can be used by other Russian and foreign universities to conduct their own research on the importance of remote language learning methods in the context of globalization. It can be conducted by teachers and students of other faculties as foreign languages are not studied only by linguistics students. In addition, a similar study can take place in schools and colleges.

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Questionnaire Sample**Table 1. Student questionnaire**

Question	Answer option
1. Are you aware with the concept of distance learning?	Yes/No.
2. Have you ever had any experience in distance learning?	Yes/No.
3. Do you think that distance learning is more convenient than traditional classes?	Yes/No.
4. Do you think that distance learning is an effective way to learn English?	Yes/No.
5. Have you ever resorted to distance learning of a foreign language?	Yes/No.
6. Are distance learning methods to learn a foreign language available in your university?	Yes/No/Sometimes.
7. Would you like your university to develop distance learning?	Yes/No.
8. Do you think your teachers support the idea of distance learning?	Yes/No.
9. What methods of distance learning (including self-directed learning) of the English language could you name? More than one option can be listed.	



**UNIVERSIDAD
DEL ZULIA**

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 36, N° 27, (2020)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.

Maracaibo - Venezuela

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