

## **DISTANCE-EDUCATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Distance learning for teaching second and foreign languages has only recently attracted the attention of specialists, in response to student demand for: greater scheduling flexibility unconstrained by time and place, and increased access to the less commonly taught languages. The profile of today's student increasingly points to someone who has already entered the work force, but still needs continuing education. This type of student is very busy with school, work, and maybe a family. While work and family needs tend to be relatively inflexible, school schedules constitute the only component that can be readily modified.

A measure of the increase in distance language learning in the UK can be seen in the way in which demand for The Open University's courses in French, German and Spanish has grown. In just over a decade, since they were first offered, numbers have increased to around 7000 students per year.

Most distance education providers employ tutors (often on a part-time basis) to support learners as they study, to assess their work and give feedback on progress [2, p.147]. In the case of languages, these tutors are likely to have gained their experience and teaching skills by working in classroom environments. Although an institution may deliver support for learners through a variety of people and resources, as Lentell [1, p.69] points out, the tutor is key, a regular point of contact for the learner who helps them learn by mediating the course materials. But, the generic tutor support role has received relatively little attention [3, p.287] and subject specific roles do not feature in the research literature at all.

The knowledge, skills and attributes required by both distance and face-to-face language teachers depend on the roles which they are expected to undertake. In distance education, tutors are part of a support network comprising three basic functions: cognitive support and development through mediation of the course materials and learning resources for individual students; affective support in developing a positive learning environment fostering commitment and self-esteem, and systemic support through administrative procedures and information management systems which are effective, transparent and student-friendly (Tait, A. 2000: 289).

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 should be 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.

During the pandemic times a lot of learning is taking place online. It's no walk in the park; both teachers and students are facing a range of challenges with technology and pedagogy. This is especially true for modern language teachers, who not only have to navigate technology, but also make themselves understood.

It can be tricky to engage students in foreign language study at the best of times, so for teachers of subjects such as English, French, German and Spanish, it's important to make online classes fun and engaging.

There are some strategies that are used to overcome some of the difficulties teachers are facing, and make the transition to remote teaching as smooth as possible:

1. There is a need to have the right equipment and tech setup. A good headset is an important thing when making the shift to online teaching. A key part of language teaching is clear and right pronunciation, so it's important that students can hear the teacher clearly and vice versa. A headset with a microphone will reduce background noise, which will help to give teacher's voice more clarity. Another important part of preparation to online teaching is being confident in the video-conferencing technology that is used.

2. It is also necessary to adjust teaching style to online teaching. Being present onscreen is different from being physically present in front of a class, and you'll need to adjust your teaching style accordingly. It will be useful to exaggerate body language a little more to come across on screen. It might feel over-the-top but it will be easier for students to understand – especially when the teacher communicates with them in a second language.

3. A teacher should make the most of free apps for language learning. Duolingo, Memrise, Hellotalk and other disruptive language learning technology can be seen as an alternative to more traditional ways of teaching and learning a foreign language, but in fact, it's more productive to view them as complementary to your teaching. Students can use their smartphones to access apps which provide a flexible way of learning outside of traditional classroom activities. That being said, many apps can be used on a desktop computer as well. What's more, Duolingo has a leaderboard which you can set up with all your students, so you can see who is progressing through the levels and who isn't [4].

4. It's necessary to use technology to teacher's advantage. They should consider voice recordings or videos for speaking and listening practice. They can use apps like Kahoot to set quizzes, which is fresher and more exciting for students than a traditional test. And instead of setting written homework, they should encourage their students to make fun presentations or film themselves .

5. It's important to tailor lesson plans to remote teaching. In a bricks-and-mortar classroom, it's normal to assign students reading activities, or give them a quiet five minutes to write a short text or work on their own. But quiet time doesn't work well to online teaching – it just creates opportunities for students to get distracted. Teachers should consider using some flipped classroom techniques such as assigning a grammar point for students to research before class, and using classroom time for discussion, elaboration and further activities. Depending on the platform that is used, students might still be able to work in groups – but it's necessary to limit the amount of text they're reading on screen, and instead to focus on more speaking activities such as role plays and debates.

6. Cultural elements can be added. When cultural knowledge is added to a language learning classroom, it provides students with the relevance of and context for the language that they are studying. It shows them the advantages of learning that language, and raises their awareness of the possibility of travelling in the future. For instance, students can use Google Earth or Maps to explore towns and cities in the country where their target language is spoken. They could even create an itinerary for their ideal day in London, for example, researching cultural landmarks, museums and restaurants they'd like to visit.

7. A teacher should keep the focus on engaging learners, share successful strategies and tips. There are lots of resources to help with online teaching in the time of coronavirus, and advice on keeping students motivated through these big upheavals [4].

It should be mentioned that time students work using computer should take turns with oral communication with a teacher and other students. 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.

So, 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 the students had, that is why it's important to include a large amount of text materials of various levels during distance learning.

## REFERENCES

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