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Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

**EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE EDUCATION FOR
TRANSLATORS IN THE FIELD OF PROFESSIONAL
COMMUNICATION**

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Abstract

With the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in Russia there have been significant changes in all spheres of life. For the first time in the country's history, schoolchildren and students have completely switched to distance, or online, education. Despite the fact that many educational institutions had the technical possibility to conduct online classes, many of them really used it only during the pandemic for the first time. This caused serious problems in the transition to online education, with both technical and personal challenges. This article discusses distance education, its advantages and disadvantages, the difference from traditional university education using the example of undergraduate and graduate students studying English in the "translator in the field of professional communication" (international relations, political science, sociology, state and civil service, etc.) program. The author's goal was to identify the degree of efficiency of online education and to provide a conclusion on the prospects of replacing traditional education. Using various methodological tools, the author's English practical classes with students were considered. To begin with, a detailed description of traditional, offline classes was given, followed by an elicitation of the advantages and disadvantages of this format of education. The author then explored online learning with the same groups of students with the same options. Finally, as a result of the comparison, the effectiveness of the two methods of foreign language learning is analyzed and the prospects for the full implementation of distance education in the future are concluded.

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1. Introduction

In March 2020, an epidemic of coronavirus began in Russia (as, however, in the rest of the world). Although the country has experienced much in recent years, it was the first time it has faced such a situation. At the end of March, President Putin announced the so-called "holiday" for citizens - a week off, during which employers had to keep wages for workers, while the whole Russian population was supposed to stay at home and maintain self-isolation (Lenta.ru, 2020). Students and schoolchildren during this period were sent on vacation by order of the Minister of Education, and no one had any idea how the situation would change further. A week later, this regime was extended until the end of April, but the Ministry announced the continuation of distance learning in educational institutions. Due to the fact that this measure was extended several times (eventually until the end of the semester), teachers and students did not see each other for most of the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020. This was an unprecedented case in the history of education in Russia (Kommersant, 2020).

The so-called new reality (or as some in Europe call it - "new normality" (Russia Today, 2020)), has come with masks and gloves worn and a ban on being outside for non-essential reason. The introduction of online education has become not an advertising feature or competitive advantage, but a dire necessity. Although distance education, webinars and recordings of lectures have long existed in the majority of Russian universities, their actual implementation has always been very slow for two reasons: the technical complexity and conservatism of the Russian education system. People are used to teaching and learning the same methods they used decades before. Many higher education institutions, including RUDN University, have been introducing digital libraries, webinars, and other attributes of online education into the learning process for more than 10 years, but their actual use has tended to zero.

Despite the fact that the urgent and mandatory implementation of distance learning format was quite problematical, the above-mentioned preparatory work greatly facilitated the transition of universities to the forced online education. What was previously thought to be the future of education around the world burst into the lives of students and teachers quickly, suddenly and without alternatives.

This article will study online education, its advantages and disadvantages, the difference with traditional education at the university, namely, using the example of undergraduate and graduate students studying English at the "translator for professional communication" (international relations, political science, sociology, state and civil service, etc.) program.

2. Problem Statement

The problem discussed in this article is the effectiveness of online education at a traditional university.

3. Research Questions

The questions posed by the author in this article are as follows:

- What are the benefits of online education;
- What are the disadvantages of online education;
- What is the attitude of students towards online education;

- What is the attitude of teachers towards online education.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research conducted in this article is to identify the degree of efficiency of online education and to obtain a conclusion about the prospects of its replacement by traditional education.

5. Research Methods

The research methodology is based on such principles as observation, description, comparison, analysis, analogy, generalization, forecasting. The principle of observation helped the author to gather information about the learning process in the groups he is teaching. The principles of description and comparison are used to obtain the material to answer the questions posed in the article. The principles of analysis and generalization allowed the author to draw conclusions from studying online learning in groups of students. Finally, the forecasting principle allowed the author to share his ideas about the future of the education system in Russia.

6. Findings

The object of the study are seminars with different groups of undergraduate and graduate students of the "translator for professional communication" program in offline and online formats, which will also be referred to in this article as traditional and remote formats respectively.

To compare, analyze and identify the effectiveness of online learning at the university, it is necessary to first describe the scheme of traditional language classes.

Offline students study face-to-face with teachers, with about 4-5 lessons per week, 80 minutes each. Depending on the course and direction of study, these lessons focus on one aspect:

- Grammar;
- Oral speech;
- Home reading;
- Press;
- Lexicology;
- Specialty.

As material, language teachers use a variety of manuals, textbooks and newspaper articles - both third-party and their own authorship. The teaching methods vary from teacher to teacher, but it is possible to identify a number of tasks that are used if not by all, but at least by most:

- Reading and translation;
- Retelling;
- Learning words;
- Doing oral and written assignments;

- Discussion of the topic;
- Debates;
- Listening;
- Written verification works;
- Written essays;

According to the author's experience, all these methods have equally high efficiency when performed in the audience. The teacher has direct visual contact with his students, and any problem arising with a student can be solved individually. Both the teacher and students are less likely and even less willing to be distracted by the constant presence of each other.

The author highlights the following as advantages of traditional English language teaching:

- Visual contact between lesson participants - they see each other and do not forget the reason they are here;
- Fewer distractions - this allows you to focus on the learning process;
- Full range of teaching methods - the teacher is unlimited in the way he or she transfers information and his/her skills to students;
- The ability to help the student individually - the teacher can physically approach and solve the student's issue/problem without exposing it to the public and without interfering with others in the learning process.

The disadvantages, according to the author of the study, are as follows:

- Possibility to forget materials at home;
- A high probability of being late for class because of traffic jams and travel time;

In general, it can be noted that the disadvantages of offline learning are identical to those of any other activity where people have to leave home. No specific shortcomings were found in the classroom training.

When switching to online education, RUDN University, as well as many other universities and organizations, used the Microsoft Teams platform and in some cases the Zoom application. Lessons are held in the same volume (4-5 lessons, 80 minutes each), the schedule has not been changed. The aspects mentioned in p.6.1. are preserved. It should be noted that due to the imperfection of these programs and the high load on them during the pandemic, the author, like most of his colleagues, had to work in groups without cameras to ensure at least the minimum acceptable quality of communication.

However, while nothing has changed regarding the materials used in distance education, serious limitations have emerged in teaching methods. Work tools such as listening and written tests are excluded due to the inability to control students, and the effectiveness of debates, essays and translations is significantly reduced for the same reason. As a result, only 50% of these methods of work remain effective, which is a critically low rate for language teaching.

The author identifies the following as the advantages of distance learning English:

- Higher attendance;
- Ability to conduct the class if it is impossible to be physically present in the classroom (sickness, traffic jams, etc.);

The disadvantages, according to the author of the study, are as follows:

- Fewer teaching methods;
- Low concentration of students, large number of distractions;
- Lack of visual contact;
- Inability to solve individual problems of students.

The author also believes it is necessary to summarize the results of discussions with students and colleagues on the effectiveness of online learning format.

Among the students, the opinion was divided: most of them were enthusiastic about the new format, and among the advantages, in addition to those mentioned above, the factor of absence of tension (from the presence of the teacher in the classroom) was repeatedly cited. A minority, though not an absolute one, spoke out negatively; among the reasons for the desire to return to the traditional format were the longing for communication with fellow students and a greater concentration while in the classroom.

The position of teachers is more unequivocal. In conversations with colleagues, the author could not find a single person who positively perceived the transition. Among the main drawbacks mentioned were technical imperfection and lack of live human communication, which plays a huge role in the learning process, the same results can be seen in numerous surveys by journalists (The Insider, 2020).

As a result, despite the fact that online training is carried out according to the schedules of traditional classes, the physical absence of participants leads to fundamental differences:

- The teacher has little control over what happens in the classroom;
- 50% of teaching methods lose their effectiveness and relevance;
- There is no lively contact between participants.

7. Conclusion

As a result of this study, the author of the article concluded that the effectiveness of online education, which until recently was considered an alternative future of world education, is greatly overestimated. Despite the obvious advantages (no need for physical presence and the opportunity to view the record), the number of disadvantages identified in this study was much higher. But the main result of the work is considered by the author to be the evidence of lower efficiency of distance learning compared to traditional one. At last, although the Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation spoke in April 2020 about further development of distance education in the country (TASS, 2020), the author is sure that in the near and medium term it will not be able to become a full-fledged substitute for full-time traditional education.

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