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Distance Learning Tools for the Development of Foreign Language Communicative Competence

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Abstract---The primary feature of modernity is the dynamic development of information technology. Students must be taught the way to select and find useful information for a particular educational task from the start. The development of this skill is based on the various learning strategies. Thus, the strategies that contribute to the development of autonomy is a crucial aspect in the process of language learning supported by the tools of modern digital technology. Distance learning, video conferencing systems, telecollaboration are technological advancements that require a new paradigm for their usage. Both asynchronous and synchronous distance learning have already become part of nowadays reality. Thus, it is difficult to question the effectiveness of this form of learning and knowledge acquisition even though there is still a lack of the "infrastructure" to take advantage of new technologies to the fullest. The subject of the article is to reflect the use of distance learning in language education. A description of empirical research was made based on the method of distance learning in linguistic education, which main goal was to assess the effectiveness and analysis of features of the distance method for studying/learning foreign languages. The subject of the study is to describe the use of e-learning in linguistic education.

Keywords—communication technologies, distance learning, foreign language learning, information learning tools, linguistic education.

Introduction

For several decades teaching and educational communication strategies have been one of the most interesting research topics in the field of foreign language learning. As early as the 1970s, it was proven that gifted students used some specific methods to comprehend information and communicate. Observations of the behaviour of these students revealed a number of ways to improve the process of language learning (Lukman et al., 2016). In addition, students with slightly lower language skills can learn to use different learning tools and, thus, optimise their foreign language study (Perez & Poole, 2019; Cho et al., 2009). The specifics of using these tools can be influenced by various individual factors, which are primarily the students' age and the learning environment. According to numerous publications, the strategies contribute to the achievement of autonomy during the learning a foreign language, which, in its turn, leads to develop the habit of everlasting learning. Therefore, the application of the strategy is a skill that is useful for all students and not only for learning foreign languages.

E-learning, distance learning, blended learning, mobile learning are not new terms. Many people benefit from the opportunities that new technologies provide for teaching and learning at the same time. More people are aware about this method of teaching but they treat it with great distrust, and teachers often perceive it as a threat to their profession. Since this study is mainly intended for foreign language teachers the topic will be discussed from the perspective of professionals in this field. Thus, the authors attempt to show what distance learning can be and how a teacher can find oneself in this virtual reality.

Distance learning of foreign languages is the development of language competence among students by using electronic devices (computers, smartphones, tablets, etc.). Distance learning can be performed synchronously or asynchronously. The first way resembles a classroom since both the teacher and the students are logged in at the same time through a video conferencing platform. Thus, students can learn the material together and participate actively in the lessons with the teacher. Meanwhile, the asynchronous way of conducting classes does not require all participants to meet in cyberspace at the same time. The teacher provides lesson materials and monitors how the tasks are performed. The student has to work independently all the time and meet the deadlines set by the teacher. This system is more flexible since allowing students to learn and perform tasks at their pace gives them full autonomy in the involvement in classes but requires more self-discipline.

Linguistic education is a field, where using information and communication technologies can support very different actions of teacher and student depending on the function it performs (Loch & Pal, 2020). Based on various and multifunctional digital tools, distance learning allows for integrating all these tools, providing integrated e-learning courses and multilateral management of the learning/teaching process, which takes place partially or completely on remote.

Due to the opportunity of creating interactive resources modern information systems such as e-learning platforms allow for performing the tasks of continuing linguistic education, considering the complexity and multidimensionality of teaching and learning foreign languages (Galan & Póltorak, 2019).

One of the key tasks of linguistic education is to provide necessary conditions for the development of communicative language competencies of the student through the implementation of specific language activities in reception, production, interaction and mediation (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages..., 2003). As well as in the real classroom, adequate organisation of the learning process is necessary to ensure the harmonious development of linguistic and intercultural skills in distance learning (Kravchenko, 2016; Rimma & Evgenia, 2014). From a technical standpoint, virtual IT environments allow for going through all stages of the learning process: from the presentation of material to evaluation. Tools integrated into the virtual environment allow for creation of resources with the same function as their classic counterparts by publishing ready-made textbooks and by creating own materials, tasks and activities that support the development of all language skills. Some tools used for programming electronic resources can also be useful for an assessment process, which is an important component of the learning process and a valuable source of information about the activities of students and teachers (Iwashita & Spence-Brown, 2018).

An important aspect of distance language learning is to provide students with enough space to increase productivity (Merisuo-Storm, 2007). In a virtual environment, this function can be performed by motivating students to express themselves in a foreign language. This can be done with exercise generators, as well as with tools for synchronous and asynchronous communication. While in most e-learning courses the means of communication (videoconferencing, chat, forum) perform only their main function of exchanging information, the teaching of foreign languages created opportunities for modelling authentic communication situations and improving oral and written interaction (Galan & Póltorak, 2019; Hilty et al., 2006).

Materials and Methods

Conscious purposeful acquisition of knowledge is regulated by certain methods and receptions. Using scientific-based methods should be considered as the most essential condition for acquiring new knowledge (Suryasa et al., 2019). The right methods navigate the direction of thoughts of the researcher, reveals the shortest way to achieve the goal and, thus, provides an opportunity for the scholar to spend energy and time rationally. The study used research methods to perform the tasks of:

- Determining the role of the student and the role of the teacher within the system of distance learning of a foreign language.
- Describing the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning of foreign languages.
- Offering effective tools for each stage of the defined form of teaching.

The scientific methods used for searching information and writing the study served as tools for practical and theoretical mastering of the research topic. Comparative method allows for determining the similarities and differences of objects and phenomena, theories, points of view, identifying the common features that are inherent for two or more objects. The discovery of these commonalities is a step towards learning patterns and laws. This method was used to identify differences, disadvantages and advantages between distance and conventional learning.

The analysis involves the division of the whole into constituent elements, i.e., the selection of features of the subject to study them separately as a part of a whole. Strict analysis is a guarantee of logical presentation of research material. Analysis and synthesis are useful methods of cognition only when they are used simultaneously. A phenomenon must be recognised as a whole to analyse it, meaning that a prerequisite for analysis is a holistic and systematic perception of it. At the same time, synthesis is impossible without the analysis, when certain aspects and elements of a whole are selected. Therefore, synthesis is a combination of parts defined during the analysis into one entity.

The study identified the main elements of distance learning, which require tools for effective study and mastery of the material (teacher-student relationship, platform for classes, student tasks, assessment). Afterwards, the importance of providing each element with the proposed tool was emphasised. The method of ascent from the abstract idea to the specific one is a process of cognition, where thinking proceeds first from the specific idea in reality to the abstract idea in conception and from the abstract idea in conception to the specific idea in conception. The study described the features of distance learning first, and only then the features of each of its elements were defined.

Results and Discussion

Description of tools for distance learning

Whether the teacher wants to limit oneself to teaching the students or wants to find a more professional approach to distance learning, the starting point is to communicate with the student. Thus, it is necessary to define the tool (tools) that will be used to provide students with materials, oral communication for the study and practice of speech, tasks, monitoring learning progress and more (Albirini, 2006). Conventional teaching tools such as a blackboard, chalk or marker, a CD player or a computer with a projector should be replaced by other tools. If there is no wide range of tools or insufficient technical training of the teacher, one can start with email, which is the simplest way to communicate online. Email provides the possibility to send a variety of materials: from a simple text document, PDF file, audio and video files, as well as links to materials posted on the Internet. This option is appropriate as a supplement to in-service learning with additional materials for homework but hardly anyone would call this method of teaching e-learning.

More advanced tools that are better suited for networking are data exchange services (such as text, audio-visual files) and their joint editing, which also offer to

store files in the so-called "cloud". The teacher can share files with students on a shared virtual disk, as well as create shared documents with them. This method of communication and transfer of materials is very convenient since everything is in one place and does not require the student to search for information through emails. Among these services are Google Drive, Dropbox and Microsoft OneDrive (Maguddayao & Medriano, 2019). Another way to communicate with students is group chats on social media networks or mobile applications. Nowadays, Messenger, WhatsApp or Skype chat are tools that are used not only by students but also by teachers. Thus, there is nothing to prevent them from being used as effective tools for distance learning (Markova et al., 2017; Passerini & Granger, 2000).

The curriculum and materials can also be posted on one's website or blog. Nowadays, this can be easily done with ISPs that offer content management systems such as Google Sites, Wix, WordPress or Blogger. The average user who does not have advanced technical knowledge can create their site for free with these tools. Access to this site or blog can be open so that anyone can use its content. One can also keep the page closed to be accessible just for students. However, one needs to realise that both ways are for the transfer of content, and not for interaction, which is absolutely necessary for teaching a foreign language.

Finally, the most professional form of distance learning is the educational platform. Platforms can be paid and free, offered by institutions and those that are individually used by the teachers themselves. Many educational institutions such as colleges, universities and others, including those with linguistic specialty, have their own educational platforms. One of the most popular free platforms is the Moodle, which gives the users opportunity for posting all sorts of learning materials on courses, communicating with participants via messaging, forum or chat, performing interactive tests (Maguddayao & Medriano, 2019). Teachers who do not have access to this platform in their educational institution or do not have the proper support from those who have previously used this tool can use free equivalents such as Edmodo, Google Classroom, Zoom, Microsoft Teams. These are public educational platforms that enable teachers to organise distance learning, post and share files, create assignments, and communicate with students.

Notably, in a situation where remote work is needed, foreign language teachers are in a beneficial position. Language publishers offer them significant support through giving access to digitised textbooks, digital platforms adapted to textbooks and other learning materials. Therefore, they can create a virtual classroom, communicate with students, set tasks and monitor their progress, as well as, use other functionalities to effectively motivate students to learn the subject.

While often necessary for the implementation of the educational process, distance education requires the direct participation of the teacher. The teacher organises the learning process, and monitors the learning activity of students. The best technological solutions or the latest software cannot replace this function of the teacher. During distance learning, teachers often face problems related to homework, which is a necessary element of consolidating the acquired knowledge.

Teachers often ask what task to offer students that not only relate to the content presented during the lesson, but also encourage activity and creativity of the students, as well as allow everyone to express their individuality. Nowadays textbooks and manuals are equipped with tools that help teachers in designing tasks. However, teachers do not always rely only on ready-made solutions. Therefore, it is important to mention E-portfolio (electronic portfolio) technology, which allows students for presenting themselves, including their personal interests, reflections and conclusions, by documenting their language achievements (Evelyn, 2019).

An electronic portfolio or digital portfolio is a digital document where a student demonstrates his/her language skills and individual achievements. It can contain files in various formats such as text, images and sound. In linguistics, its prototype is the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which focused on demonstrating students' language skills and intercultural experience from different periods of study (both school and extracurricular) of the proposed foreign language (Utomo et al., 2020). Current situation allows for returning to the concept of portfolio and changing the way it is presented. The Internet portals (not only in the native language) and the exchange of personal information through them are important elements for modern students. In the age of the Internet, it is not a problem to establish and maintain contact with people from other countries. During creation of the content that marks the level of their linguistic development, the students have the opportunity to track their progress, and develop self-reflection of critical thinking since they decide what materials will be in the portfolio. Thus, during the preparation of this content, the student improves the skills of searching, selecting, organising and evaluating information. Creating an electronic portfolio requires self-discipline, regular replenishment and updates of the content (Gómez García et al., 2020).

The task of creating the electronic portfolio independently makes the student responsible for its visual presentation. Individual decision-making about the appearance of the portfolio allows for developing personal creative approach. The content of the e-portfolio can be enriched by the use of materials from the outside sources (for example, videos, fragments of text or photos downloaded from other sites). Thus, the role of the teacher is to explain the concept of copyright and the rules of the using materials from other authors. Creating an e-portfolio does not require using many tools due to the ready-made solutions such as Google Sites, Everbote, Edublog, Weebly, WordPress or Sewsaw. Their simple interface allows stakeholders to create personalised and visually diverse content.

According to P. Benson, the e-portfolio method is supporting the autonomy of the student since the teacher places the responsibility for its preparation and its content on student-author. Considering the fact that it is prepared independently with electronic tools without constant presence of a teacher and performs educational functions, an electronic portfolio is a good option in the framework of distance learning (Benson, 2011). Guth & Helm (2010), identify telecollaboration (English: telecollaboration) as another tool for teaching and learning foreign languages online. In the Ukrainian teaching environment, this concept is associated with the terms intercultural online exchange, television or virtual exchange. This tool is new for many teachers, some have not heard of

telecollaboration at all. However, it has been present in foreign language teaching since the 1990s. The new dimension of this approach was given to it due to the development of the Internet, technology and the ability to create original content by website users, as well as interaction with other people during their creation.

The main goal of the telecollaboration project is to give the opportunities to learn the language together and share cultural experiences for students living in remote parts of the world. However, such cooperation should not be limited to linguistic education (Kumar et al., 2021). Nowadays, thematic telecollaboration related to the field of study, where a foreign language is a means of communication and exchange of basic meaning, is also very popular. Cooperation between students, teachers and schools, as well as between students and universities can be formalised under the auspices of Erasmus+ subsidiary programmes such as e-twinning for schools and UNICollaboration for higher education institutions. At the same time, this cooperation can be organised by individual teachers or groups of teachers who are open to such activities instead of a formal way with the strictness of external institutions (Mesihovic et al., 2020).

The first step in starting a telecollaboration project is to find a partner or partners for cooperation. If the teacher is confident in all partners' preparedness to join efforts in a team project, it is necessary to find a topic that could interest the participants. Teachers should define the goals of joint work and study, the time and logistical possibilities of all potential partners. The different number of hours of communication with the teacher in partner institutions, the difference in time or breaks in training are the elements that can have a significant impact on online cooperation. Partners must decide on how the project will be implemented, the types of tools used and the expected results. Depending on the age group and technical capabilities of students, specific decisions about the choice of individual programmes and applications for content creation can be communicated to students. Project participants should be able to get to know each other for this task, one can use text communication tools (chat or forum on a common educational platform, groups on social networks, etc.), or video conferencing programmes. Thus, the participants of the telecollaboration will be able to see each other "live" on remote (Walek et al., 2017).

The role of all teachers involved in the project is to create teams that meet the requirements for the task, to develop clear instructions and give precise deadlines for each stage. These are key elements, which should not be neglected to avoid unnecessary frustration and lack of expected results. Depending on the objectives and duration of the project, the stages of the work can be presented orally or in writing, at a forum of separate groups or the whole team, and the end result should be presented and discussed by all parties involved in the project. Learning through telecollaboration should be focused on performing a specific task. Therefore, project work can involve the joint creation of any product such as collective writing of a text, information leaflet, website, development of educational materials or videos, etc. Telecollaboration may also include the evaluation or correction of materials prepared by partners. The first stage of the project is based on joint actions taken within local groups, and only afterwards comes a stage of international cooperation. The range of possibilities depends on

the ingenuity of teachers who organise a telecollaboration project as part of their classes.

The primary advantage of using the method of telecollaboration is that the tasks that students must perform are based on every day or professional life. These school tasks narrow the psychological gap between the classroom and the real world. The student does not complete the task for the teacher just to read and evaluate it, which is an artificial and unreliable situation. It creates useful text that will be used for the purposes for which this type of text is intended. The implementation of the telecollaboration project is based on joint cooperation, where every participant of the task is responsible both for its implementation and for the final result. Thus, students develop confidence and creativity, learn to make decisions, master the art of negotiation and compromise, methods of argumentation and justification of choice. Transferring responsibility for the implementation of the project (and, consequently, for learning) from teacher to student has another advantage since it affects the development of the students' independence by "forcing" them to constantly think and make decisions (Mesihovic et al., 2020).

In the conventional model of education, the teacher is the main authority. In teaching that uses the project method (not necessarily telecollaboration), the student draws knowledge from various sources and, thus, must learn to determine their value and choose the right information (dos Santos & Cechinel, 2019). The transfer of knowledge no longer consists of a monologue directed by the teacher to the student, but becomes a multidirectional dialogue. The goal is not to succinctly transfer certain knowledge from a particular area but to develop student's ability to search independently for sources and identify connections between their various areas. Education goes beyond the conventional classroom and textbook, beyond the strictly defined boundaries of how and what to teach. The telecollaboration project offers students a great freedom to realise their ideas at every stage of education, strengthens responsibility and motivation, which are in great demand by employers in the labour market nowadays.

Telecollaboration is a direction that should be considered not only in the teaching of foreign languages but also in modern education in general. However, shifting responsibility for one's learning to students does not relieve the teacher from responsibility to prepare students to participate in this project. In collaboration with partners from other classes, schools or countries, the teacher must clearly define the objectives of this programme, develop an action plan, working schedule, define the general roles of participants, and, finally, hand over further management. Teacher's role is to monitor compliance with the rules, respond in cases where the situation in the group gets out of control, as well as change the schedule depending on the circumstances. All partners should be aware of the differences between the curricula, schedule, or level of qualification of specific partner groups. Considering these factors, conscious synchronisation of any actions is necessary (Gravani, 2019).

If the planning is poorly done the project can be a failure and instead of positive results it will leave only dissatisfaction and a feeling of lost time. Properly planned actions ensure satisfaction from a well-performed task and positive results for

students and teachers involved in the project ([Marpaung & Hambandima, 2018](#)). Properly conducted telecollaboration project combines language learning, development of intercultural communicative competence and the ability to use online tools. In addition, both students and teachers who participate in telecollaboration develop their organisational skills, creativity and adaptability ([Tsou et al., 2006](#)).

Among the new digital strategies that are becoming increasingly popular is the flipped classroom. This approach is defined by researchers as a certain philosophy of teaching as well as study ([Ho, 2020](#)). This is not a new approach but the IT tools available today make it much more relevant. Therefore, this method, despite the fact that it was originally used in the conventional system of lessons, i.e., in the classroom, can be completely transferred to the distance learning environment. A flipped classroom is an approach that is often contrasted with the conventional style of teaching. The common way of conducting classes is learning new material by the students. Lessons are designed to introduce new questions, practice specific skills and test the level mastering of the material. The teacher is an authority and expert in a particular field. Within the flipped classroom approach, this model changes since the teacher no longer presents new material, and the students learn it by themselves. In the lesson, on the contrary, with the help of the teacher, they expand and consolidate it, as well as practice certain skills. Thus, students can ask questions, discuss or analyse the phenomenon based on existing knowledge.

The correct and effective application of the strategy of the flipped classroom requires the teacher to plan the objectives of the lesson and the content implemented in its course accurately. Thus, the teacher should look for or prepare independently educational materials that will be used by students such as videos, audio recordings, texts or lists of links to certain web pages. These resources must be carefully selected, thought out, being appropriate to students' age, and develop concentration and information processing skills. It is important that the materials come from reliable sources. The method of presenting content, as well as the material itself should be interesting to the audience ([Ruiz, 2018](#)). An indispensable element of the teacher's activity is the introduction of students to the idea of a flipped classroom. The teacher must explain to students the benefits of this method, set rules, as well as encourage and motivate independent activity. At this stage, the teacher must also present the topic of classes in inverted form and their goals. The teacher also should evaluate the existing knowledge of students from this subject and systematise them. Discussion or brainstorming could be used here.

After preparing the learning materials, the teacher makes them available to students. As mentioned above, modern technology allows for using many ways to communicate. The material provided to students should be organised not only by content but also by form. In practice, this means that students must receive all the resources in one email, one message, or one lesson on a bulletin board on any platform used by the group. Regardless of the method of communication, it is important to remember that students need to know exactly what information the teacher expects them to learn, what tasks they must perform and how. Therefore, the message must be clear, legible and precise.

The next stage of the inverted lesson is the independent work of the student, who learns the materials provided by the teacher at own pace (Ho, 2020). The student gets acquainted with general sources, searches for and selects additional information, supplements and checks one's knowledge, makes notes, prepares to use the independently acquired knowledge in the next lesson with the teacher. The student's materials can also be used as part of a personal e-portfolio. During a school lesson or a lesson conducted remotely using video conferencing tools, the teacher organises, discusses and verifies the information provided by students. It is also a time to systematise the information they have acquired, to perform practical exercises that expand, strengthen and develop knowledge and skills. This stage can proceed in different ways. One of them is the division of students into groups and setting tasks for them in accordance with the level of their knowledge or their capabilities. Depending on the subject matter, the test can take various forms such as discussing the subject, conducting experiments or participating in the creation of a mini-project.

The final stage of a properly conducted inverted lesson is a joint summarising of the topic and determining whether it has been implemented and to what extent (Ho, 2020). Thus, the teacher's task is to determine the level of knowledge and skills acquisition by students. In their turn, students make a self-assessment of their achievements, as well as of their colleagues. Using an inverted lesson strategy has many benefits for both the teacher and the student. First of all, by using this technique, the learning process is individualised and adapted to the individual pace and capabilities. When applying the inverted class strategy, teachers support students in developing skills of self-acquisition of knowledge, as well as teach critical thinking, finding materials and assessing their reliability. When using the tools of new technologies at the stage of individual gathering of information and preparation for their presentation at the class forum, the student develops skills of functioning in a digital environment and stimulates creativity.

The idea of a flipped classroom originated from a very practical phenomenon faced by many teachers, i.e., truancy. This approach eliminates this problem since the students receive the required information by themselves. Metaphorically speaking, the teacher is the mediator in this system, but it is the students who are responsible for achieving the goal (DeWitt & Fong, 2019). The reverse class strategy works very well for linguistic education for many reasons. First of all, online resources contain a large number of materials that can be used effectively for the preparation of individual classes. Videos that explain the rules of grammar, sites that help to develop language skills, a large number of online resources with exercises to learn vocabulary, sharing articles in foreign languages, online translators and online dictionaries are only a small number of the options that teachers can use for preparing materials for students (Markova et al., 2021).

In addition, independent work on reading information on a specific topic in a foreign language allows for checking unfamiliar words without worries. Playing the recording in a foreign language repeatedly and including subtitles (if provided) helps students to fully understand the text without time constraints, which are inevitable in conventional classes. Lack of teacher control and fear of peer

pressure allow both students who work more slowly and those who lack fewer repetitions to make the best use of time (Da Rocha Ribeiro et al., 2018). The changes in modern education cover many areas. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to be open to a new approach to teaching and learning. The teacher stops being the only source of knowledge and expert in a particular field. At the same time, the teacher can become a leader in the search for knowledge, a partner in the learning process and inspire the student to expand their knowledge. The application of the flipped classroom approach allows for implementation of these tasks and, thus, helps the student to develop competencies to function in the future educated society.

WebQuest as one of the most effective distance learning tools

When it comes to effective distance learning tools, WebQuest is worth notice (Dodge, 1997). This is a method of teaching that has proven itself to be effective for working with students at almost all stages of learning such as high school, college, and higher education. It is used to study general, professional subjects, as well as foreign languages. Tasks in WebQuest can be subject-based, i.e., based on messages from only one area of study, but they can also be interdisciplinary using messages from several subjects at the same time. Thus, it is a method that can combine the study of subject content with the study of a foreign language. WebQuest allows for combining classroom learning with distance learning (blended learning). This is a good option for transferring teaching to the network completely (Rico-Troncoso, 2018). It is not only suitable for group work but can also be used by individual students. This is a method that can be used both in one-time school classes and as a long-term project.

WebQuest is not a new discovery. Back in 1995, B. Dodge described and named the method, which soon became a very popular tool for teaching and learning in many countries (Dodge, 1997). It is based on constructivism, which is a theory in psychology that involves the creative activity of the student. It is based on the idea of using the Internet as a tool to gain not only knowledge but also develop skills. Since the appearance of the method in the late 20th century and to this day, the Internet has become much more accessible to the average student. Its ever-increasing functionality and volume of new information allow users to use resources much more widely to learn at every stage of the education process.

Before discussing in detail, the application of WebQuest in linguistic education, it is worth exploring the theoretical foundations of this method. WebQuest is a learning method focused on developing the student's knowledge through the Internet. Its purpose is to teach how to search for information, select it, develop it, evaluate its usefulness and use the messages obtained to perform any task. WebQuest must consist of the following elements to fulfil its role (Milkowska-Samul, 2020):

- The topic can be a supplement to the content required by the curriculum; it can also be related to current events or topics.
- The introduction performs an informational function. It is designed to present the topic, context and conditionality of the problem so that the

student, who is given the task, can understand and imagine the situation in which he must find oneself.

- The task describes the final product, it explains how the problem should be solved and in what form the solution should be presented. The end result can be a report, a multimedia presentation, a film, an article, a website, a work of art, etc. The task must be clearly set and feasible above all. It should be formulated in a way that the student cannot do it by copying the material directly from the network but would have to analyse it in various ways and then present it accordingly.
- The method describes how the didactic process should be organised and explains the strategies that the student should use to complete the task. It may contain a description of the roles that participants will play in the task, as well as a timeline or a more detailed description of the steps that students must take to complete the task.
- Sources are websites and other resources that a student will use to complete a task. They can also be tips for communicating with experts, which may be useful in obtaining information about the subject.
- An indispensable element of WebQuest is the evaluation of performance. This assessment should provide an opportunity to measure the level of engagement and achievement of students, as well as provide them with feedback. From the teacher's standpoint, it should be presented in a way that the conclusions obtained assist in the development of possible further projects.
- In the end there should be a summary of the gained experience. Its purpose is to encourage the student to think about the process and results of the task (Milkowska-Samul, 2020).

WebQuest is a method with a fairly wide range of applications and is suitable for use in various disciplines. It is also great for teaching foreign languages. A career-oriented foreign language teacher is usually not an expert in the language one teaches. There is also often a lack of linguistic training and materials developed for this field. However, one can find many specialised materials in the target language of instruction on the Internet, which due to their authenticity can be interesting to students. Thus, the teacher, on the one hand, teaches the language through a professional context, and, on the other hand, transmits specialised content in a foreign language.

Using the WebQuest method allows for developing all the basic language skills. The student who reads the different types of texts posted on the network must understand them and extract the information necessary to complete the task. Among the sources provided by the teacher there may be videos and podcasts, which allows for practicing the dexterity of listening to real texts. The final product of the project should be a task, which can often be in a written form such as a report, article or other type of message selected to achieve the purpose of WebQuest. At the final stage, students must present their work to the group, which, in its turn, involves a presentation of the student's communication skills.

When using WebQuest, the teacher plays a rather passive role by transferring responsibility for learning to students. The teacher stops being a mentor and becomes a consultant. However, the teacher's role is extremely important,

especially at the design stage. The topic and tasks must be very well thought out; the task should be interesting for the student and feasible above all. The teacher must clearly and distinctly describe the principle of evaluating the results of work for the students to know from the beginning which elements will be considered (Rico-Troncoso, 2018). This method is an example of pragmatic and practical learning. Its advantage is that it activates, stimulates and motivates students. When using the Internet, a student can work at own pace. This gives students the opportunity to process information creatively, while developing their ability to develop knowledge resources for their needs.

Previously presented tools and methods are one of the most effective ones for distance learning, especially in case of foreign language teaching. However, the resources offered in WebQuest, a telecollaboration project or an electronic portfolio are not the forms that should be used in every training unit. An online lesson is conducted with the same rules as a classroom lesson. The teacher introduces new material, helps students to practice skills, checks the level of their mastery, evaluates. In other words, the teacher performs all tasks in the same way as one would do conventionally in the classroom. However, online learning should not be based solely on transferring lesson content from the school premises to the Internet. Student participation during a distance lesson is different to the activity in the classroom, especially if these lessons are conducted asynchronously, when students perform tasks in their time and individual pace, regardless of classmates or teachers (Jeong, 2018).

When preparing remote classes, the teacher must take students' place and look at the material prepared for them through their eyes (Roman et al., 2020). Does the student know and understand what is expected of them? Does the student know how to do the exercise? Does the student know the deadline and the consequences of its failure? During a face-to-face lesson, students may be asked to explain unclear things at any time. During an online meeting, this is much more difficult, so the teacher should answer students' potential questions and get feedback as soon as possible about their work and progress in learning. Another problem that entails asynchronous classes is their potential uniformity. One way to encourage students during online lessons is to add exercises and interactive tasks. There are useful tools available online that can revitalise science, give students the opportunity to test their knowledge and skills, and help teachers assess their own learning and student achievement. A common feature of the tools presented below is that they do not require users to be skilled in their previous work. They can be divided into several groups according to their purpose:

Presentation of the material. Conventional multimedia presentations prepared in the classroom are not always suitable for remote lessons. They must be supplemented with an oral text to be a full-fledged material for independent work, which will be presented by the teacher during live lessons. For this task one can use the "Sound Recorder" option, which is available in most programmes. Conventionally created presentations are usually not very attractive visually. Tools can be used to create more interactive materials that could be more interesting to students (Freitas & Salgado, 2020):

- Genially – a platform for creating slides and presentations that look professional, not limited to photos and text but using various interactive elements as well. With Genially one can also prepare educational games.
- Video Puppet – it can be used to turn presentations into video with sound. The text saved in the comments will be automatically read by the voice generator. The user has the opportunity to choose both the language of the presentation and the voice and accent from a large number of sentences.
- Screencast-o-Matic – is a video creation and editing tool that can be launched directly from a browser. The basic version allows for creating 15-minute records without having to create an account. With this resource, one can use a multimedia presentation, other materials on computer screen, or on-screen recordings of additional actions performed on the screen to create a video lesson or lecture.

Interactive exercises. Interactive games or cards can make any lesson more interesting, even if the participant is an adult. The purpose of using this type of resource is to replicate the material, practice and test students' skills and progress. Feedback on the results obtained serves as an assessment of the results of individual work. Thus, the teacher can assess the level of mastery of the material and decide if further work on a particular issue is needed (Freitas & Salgado, 2020):

- Kahoot – it is a well-known tool used by teachers at different levels of education to create quizzes. However, it not only serves as a team game during classroom or live video conferencing but can also be part of a remote asynchronous lesson.
- Quizlet gives many opportunities even in the basic version: from standard playing cards to learning a foreign language by using the module “LEARN” for self-study, which allows students to create their dictionaries, write dictations by ear, and contains interactive games and tests.
- Quizizz – this is another intuitive platform with a user-friendly interface that allows teachers to create different exercises as well as use suggestions prepared by others.
- Wordwall allows for creating both interactive exercises and materials in print. They can be created using a variety of ready-made templates, which gives teachers great opportunities to prepare interesting, non-standard tasks.
- Learningapps – it is similar to the previous programme, which allows for creating interactive exercises based on common templates. It is quite easy to use, and a large number of matrices provides a space for creating interesting and diverse tasks of different levels of complexity.

Assessment. One of the stages of training should be assessment. In education, there is the concept of both a formal summary assessment in the form of tests, module tests or exams, and a formative assessment that occurs throughout the educational process. For distance learning, conducting formal online tests other than oral is much more difficult due to the inability to verify the independence of the student. Thus, in distance learning, the assessment and monitoring of the learning process are more important than their measurable consequences. An example of a formative assessment is a collective check of what students have

learned in class (Freitas & Salgado, 2020). Answergarden is a tool that allows for giving short answers to questions asked by the teacher and displays them on user screens as a general result. With this the application the teacher can ask questions to check the level of knowledge and skills of students before and after the lesson.

The Internet also allows students to monitor individual progress through online quizzes. Many of the above-mentioned platforms for creating interactive exercises also allow for creating ones that can serve as a test to determine students' skills. These tools are Quizlet, Quizizz and Learningapps. There are also publicly available tools that are directly designed to evaluate students' knowledge and skills (Galan & Póltorak, 2019). These include:

- Testmoz – convenient and simple test generator, which provides a wide range of suggestions for exercises, various settings for visual design of the test page, the possibility to give feedback and access control, detailed statistics of results, as well as the possibility to clone tests.
- Google Forms – it is a tool for creating online surveys but it can be used to design tests with a set of different types of test tasks and to analyse student responses. It is an easy-to-use tool that allows for transferring a test from a text version to an electronic one in no time.
- Socrative – it is a tool for preparing a quiz, both in the form of a conventional test and in the form of a time trial with other students. The tool is also useful for getting feedback from students on the comprehensibility of the material presented during the lesson.

The above tools work well in school and academic testing. However, this type of assessment should be used with caution. Although their use in the classroom under the supervision of a teacher does not pose many risks, in distance learning this method of assessment should be treated with some caution. In situations where the test result is important to the student, there may be dishonesty in learning, which is difficult or even impossible to verify in case of distance learning. The rapid development of technology has not passed by the education sector and began to improve the learning process due to the opportunities given by new tools. The use of applications and platforms in the learning process is becoming common practice. However, the large number of opportunities does not facilitate the choice but on the contrary forces to search constantly and test new options.

The decision to introduce distance learning of a foreign language in schools and universities must be well thought out and justified. It is a mistake to assume that such classes are a form of saving. Distance learning is very expensive since it requires proper technological base, teachers' training and students' support. Learning a language online cannot replace direct contact with native speakers even in synchronous mode. Students or pupils who participate in classes should be guaranteed the opportunity to speak directly so that language learning takes place in the most natural way. It is also important to know that not only the teacher is responsible for the success of distance language learning. The teacher should not be required to be an experienced user of the language one teaches, a highly specialised methodologist, a large textbook author, a computer technician

with many years of experience, and a school psychologist. The new form of language teaching requires the discovery of a new direction in academic research, teacher education and, above all, the development of textbooks and teaching materials in collaboration with experts in many fields.

Conclusions

Considering the tools and benefits of e-learning described in the study, which obvious feature is the lack of direct contact between participants in the learning process, a relationship between teacher and student requires special attention. In distance education, the role of the teacher is often limited to control and support of the student at different stages of one's activity. Thus, a significant responsibility lies with the student, who is entrusted to organise the work on the development of certain material independently. This concept fits into the preconditions of constructivism, for which learning is a process of acquiring knowledge based on active information processing. On the one hand, this framework provides conditions for the development of learning skills to which language didactics assigns the appropriate rank among general competencies. On the other hand, the lack of direct contact with the teacher is associated with some barriers such as limited stimulation for language activities or difficult access to the language model. Obviously, such a specific type of education as distance learning puts high expectations on both teacher and student. In the remote model, the teacher stops being the main source of knowledge and information, taking on the role of leader whose main task is to support the student in independent and active acquisition of knowledge and skills. Considering the above opportunities and conditions of distance education, it could be concluded that learning supported by virtual information systems creates the potential for different types of language education.

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