

УДК

МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ НАУЧНО- ТЕХНИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРНЕТ-КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ  
«ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ, НАУКЕ И ПРОИЗВОДСТВЕ»

Название доклада: Problems and advantages of applying the e-learning model to the teaching of  
English

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In this article we mention some potential and noted problems and advantages of applying the e-learning model to the teaching of English. In the area of foreign language teaching a lot has been done, but there are constant attempts for new solutions. Another option for e-learning is a hybrid course.

Among numerous modes of technology enhanced learning there are not many that have received as much attention as distance learning. Stimulated by the recent rapid developments in Web technologies, researchers in education are constantly working to make the most of technological resources and put them to the best pedagogical use.

In this article we mention some potential and noted problems and advantages of applying the e-learning model to the teaching of English. The greatest problem is the lack of face-to-face communication with peers and the teacher. Typical general distance learning systems do not have installed systems to support communication, and as such they are not quite suitable for foreign language learning. By using additional tools such as Google Talk, Skype, various forums, etc. these problems can be overcome. The next problem is the computer-aided verification of students' answers to tests other than multiple choices. Even the simplest fill-in tasks, reduced to a single word can be counted as incorrect because of spelling errors or even blank spaces. For more sophisticated fill-in tasks, multiple matching, sentence transformation, and the like, which are so typical for language study, this system could not be used at all. Some specialized distance learning systems are capable of solving some of these problems, but not all. An even greater problem is the automatic pronunciation checking. Another problem is the motivation of distance learning students. In case of English courses, which do not aim only at acquiring knowledge but also some skills, including communication skills, this problem seems to be the greatest. An extremely significant task of the teacher in preparing the material and implementing the course is how to retain a high level of interaction in the teaching (virtual) environment despite the limited direct contact. The key problem for the students, however, remains the lack of opportunities for direct oral peer communication as well as with the teacher. To alleviate this potential feeling of isolation of distance learning students and strengthen their sense of belonging to the group and the institution, sometimes they are given group problem-solving tasks, and the complete e-mail or chat correspondence is sent to the teacher. This is the area which will be given more attention in the future.

Despite the disadvantages e-learning model has, its benefits in teaching English are undeniable. Another option for e-learning is a hybrid course. Theory defines it as: "Hybrid systems usually comprise a collection of materials made available on CD-ROM or on an institutional intranet, with links to the Web and regular contact with tutors by email, telephone or videoconferencing." (Walker, 2007). All basic teaching materials are available offline – coursebooks, practice material, some audio materials, answer keys for all the tasks. Some of the noted advantages of a hybrid course include: no need for the student to be constantly online, thus avoiding potential technical problems, all the students have the same teaching materials, in this case high quality coursebooks.

The key issue in the realization of a hybrid course is how to convey at the distance the existing teaching materials and activities, especially the instructions. All the classes should be planned in great detail in advance, carried out and recorded in Power Point as slides and as narration. Everything that the teacher says, asks, or explains in the classroom s/he anticipates and records in the Power Point presentation. Having the narrated recording, which is richer than just the text on the slides, is very important for several reasons. Primarily, it gives the student the sense of a 'real' teaching session. For foreign language teaching in particular this is essential because the student both sees the text and hears the pronunciation, which is not possible if lectures are given only in the written pdf. format. The narration explains and elaborates the slides, but also addresses the students directly, inviting them for further communication, and serves both as the instruction and listening comprehension activity. When working with the coursebooks, the students are very precisely directed to the pages in the coursebooks, with very detailed instructions and explanations. It is important to note that the students can pause the

narration to complete the task from the coursebook, and then go on to the next activity/task at their own pace, unlike the students in the classroom, who have to follow some average pace of the group. The e-learning students, unlike classroom students, can also repeat the slides/narration as many times as they want, thus having more time for listening to the lectures/activities. The Power Point slides and recorded narration are accompanied by the lecture texts (mostly the more formal and structured explanations of grammar, vocabulary, learning and problem-solving strategies, homework tasks and mini-project assignments) in the pdf. format. Together with the coursebooks and recorded classes, for all the activities in class, all tasks and practice materials, there are additional pdf. files with the answer keys and model/suggested answers. The audio CD, which is a part of the coursebook pack, is available only online, but, of course, as the commercial CD, it can be bought together with the coursebook. Naturally, if the students need or want to, they can always check their answers with the teacher, via e-mail. A student can also record her/his comments and send them via e-mail as the audio file.

What is especially significant and needs special emphasis is the fact that there is a very strong support segment for the e-learning student from the teacher, who regularly communicates with them via e-mail in English and in their mother tongue. Moreover, the students can also communicate among themselves, via e-mail, forum or chat. From the point of view of the teacher, such classes, as well as course management as a whole, request much more demanding and more detailed preparation, engagement and organizational skills, as well as a considerable level of technological skills. It is possible to realize a successful foreign language distance learning course by applying the combination of pedagogical insights, traditional teaching methods and modern technologies.

#### ЛИТЕРАТУРА

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