

**VADASKA SVITLANA,**

Senior Teacher,  
National Technical University of Ukraine  
“Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic  
Institute”, Kyiv, Ukraine

## **DISTANCE LEARNING TOOLS AND SERVICES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS FOR STUDENTS**

*Distance learning is a subject discussed and described by many authors. In Ukrainian higher education institutions it is used as a part of blended learning. But in the condition of the pandemic this style of studying has become the only way to train students. The main forms of distance learning appropriate for teaching English for students of technical specialties are considered in the article. The resources that can be particularly useful and effective for the students are presented. In order to diversify the studying process, it is advisably to use several resources taking into account the type and the purpose of the assignments, the students' proficiency, and the technical facilities of the students. The main disadvantage of distance learning is the lack of communication and collaboration. Thus, it is important to implement the resources which enable the students to interact with each other or to work in small groups. To create the most effective working environment, great attention is paid to the choice of the types of the assignments. Testing of students is another important question that must be solved.*

**Key words:** distance learning, collaborative activities, educational resources, self-directed work

*Дистанційне навчання - це тема, яка викликає інтерес багатьох авторів. В українських вищих навчальних закладах дистанційне навчання інтегрується в освітній процес як частина змішаного навчання. Але в умовах пандемії такий стиль навчання став єдиним способом навчання студентів. У статті розглянуті основні форми дистанційного навчання, які підходять для вивчення англійської мови студентами технічних спеціальностей. Представлені ресурси, які можуть бути особливо корисними і ефективними для студентів. Щоб урізноманітнити навчальний процес, рекомендується використовувати кілька ресурсів, з огляду на тип і мету завдань, рівень підготовки студентів і*

технічну оснащеність студентів. Головний недолік дистанційного навчання - відсутність спілкування та співпраці. Таким чином, важливо впровадити ресурси, які дозволять студентам взаємодіяти один з одним, або працювати в невеликих групах. Щоб створити максимально ефективне робоче середовище, велика увага приділяється вибору типів завдань. Тестування студентів - ще одне важливе питання, яке необхідно вирішити під час дистанційного навчання.

**Ключові слова:** дистанційне навчання, групова діяльність, навчальні ресурси, самостійна робота.

Дистанционное обучение - это тема, которая вызывает интерес многих авторов. В украинских высших учебных заведениях дистанционное обучение интегрируется в учебный процесс как часть смешанного обучения. Но в условиях пандемии такой стиль обучения стал единственным способом обучения студентов. В статье рассмотрены основные формы дистанционного обучения, подходящие для обучения английскому языку студентов технических специальностей. Представлены ресурсы, которые могут быть особенно полезными и эффективными для студентов. Чтобы разнообразить учебный процесс, рекомендуется использовать несколько ресурсов, учитывая тип и цель заданий, уровень подготовки студентов и техническую оснащенность студентов. Главный недостаток дистанционного обучения - отсутствие общения и сотрудничества. Таким образом, важно внедрить ресурсы, которые позволят студентам взаимодействовать друг с другом или работать в небольших группах. Чтобы создать максимально эффективную рабочую среду, большое внимание уделяется выбору типов заданий. Тестирование студентов - еще один важный вопрос, который необходимо решить.

**Ключевые слова:** дистанционное обучение, групповая деятельность, учебные ресурсы, самостоятельная работа.

Higher education is a main factor that influences the development of modern society. Thus, its development and implementation of modern technology and innovative approaches must be considered. The standards and goals of higher education institutions are changing in accordance with the requirements and demands of contemporary society, political and economical trends, and world globalization. Due to the European Integration, Ukraine has provided the Bologna

system of education. The expanding of cooperation in different spheres has resulted in the increasing the role of foreign language for training highly qualified specialists and competitive employees. Technological development of our society has promoted the proliferation of different resources, computer applications and innovative methods for studying and teaching foreign languages. The current conditions of our life in pandemic period require the thorough choice of approaches, means and resources of study.

Despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic, the educational process must meet all the requirements, follow the goals and be concentrated on the quality of study. The studying process must be flexible, diverse, permanent and effective. The assessment system must be paid great attention. The aim of this article is to consider different ways of foreign language study in the pandemic period and to determine the types of activities that can improve the effectiveness and quality of study and promote the motivation of students.

A lot of authors consider the role of distance learning, its advantages and disadvantages, the possibilities for students and teachers. This way of study was implemented by many institutions for different purposes. Some institutes and universities developed distance courses for obtaining certificates and degrees in disciplines for less cost or to expand the possibilities to get education for those who can not attend lectures, etc. For the students of Institute of Aerospace Technologies the distance courses are developed in order to organize the self directed work provided by the curricula. They help to intensify the studying of foreign language, to use modern technologies, to supplement a course with additional materials in the form of audio and video files, Power Point presentations, pictures and diagrams. Diverse types of tasks in distance course help to draw interest and increase motivation of students [5]. In the current situation we extensively use distance courses in the mode of online learning changing the purposes and assessment system.

Our age is associated with the rapid development of technology and its implementations in different branches. Education is not an exception. This idea is supported by Robson [8]. Modern students do not accept the traditional ways and means of studying because these resources are limited in materials and activities. Many authors pointed out that the distance learning enables to engage all students in the educational process that helps students to become more responsible for their quality of knowledge. The distance learning is centered on self-directed study and the students can follow their own pace and preferences in the way of doing different tasks. They have the possibility to have several attempts in order to improve the result and be confidence in their knowledge. Also, the students are not limited in time, thus they can be more attentive and careful while doing tasks.

Distance learning is a perfect way for students to develop different useful skills. According to MacDonald distance learning promotes the development of critical and

analytical thinking that is closely related to the self-directed learning [6]. Distance courses enable teachers to use more materials and students can have an access to a large number of resources. Critical and analytical thinking skills help students to find and choose the required information, to summarize the most important points and to make right conclusions [7]. Distance courses help to create tasks that train and improve communicative skills. These tasks include forums for discussion interesting topics and controversial questions, agreeing and disagreeing with different statements on particular subjects. Also, it can be the comparison of diagrams and data, completing the stories etc. Formal writing is an important skill for educated people. Mastering this skill involves the main rules and practical tips dealing with document layout, style, common phrases. The students should be presented the examples of the documents and tasks that help them to train their knowledge. After that the students can practice their own writing. These activities require much time, therefore, we include them in distance courses to save time during practical classes, to give students the possibility to do these tasks properly increasing their awareness.

Applying the distance courses as a primary means of study during quarantine indicated its effectiveness. The students were provided with the sufficient number of various tasks and materials. They could practice their reading, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and writing skills. The texts were interesting and contained useful facts and data. The students could improve lexical competence, train grammar, used a lot of visual materials. They worked and studied in pleasant environment and in convenient conditions. But the students pointed out the lack of oral communication, team work, and collaborative activities. One more problem we faced with was the student assessing, because all the tasks had to be matched with the rating system adopted by the institute. The content, the volume of the material, the types of activities and the system of assessing had to be improved to create a successful learning environment.

One more challenge dealing with the using of the distance courses is the time schedule for completing the units or the assignments. When the distance courses are used to provide the hours of individual work, the students have longer periods of time to do the tasks. But using the distance course as a part of practical class, the students need strict time limits in order the teacher can assess the work of the students. The materials presented in the distance courses are used to supplement the topics studied in the class. In the current conditions the materials should be updated and improved. In order to create the friendly learning environment for the students in the period of pandemic, the distance course assignments should be supplied by clear instructions and visual materials. The visuals can be presented in the form of charts and diagrams, pictures and schemes; it also can be a list of key concepts and ideas [9]. Visual materials can simplify the perception of material, the

understanding of complex ideas, the relationships between notions and phenomena. Visuals can help students to improve their lexical competence, writing skills. Visual materials are important elements of different written tasks and forums for discussions and warming-up activities.

Interaction is one of the most important aspects in the distance learning. Modern online resources can promote collaboration and active group work. The teacher can create session rooms in Zoom. This option enables students to work in pairs or small teams. This option was valuable for the first year students who started their learning distantly. This helped them to know each other better and to be more confident. The teacher can divide the class in groups randomly or do it with the intention to unite in one team the students with the different or similar language proficiency. The activities can be different: sharing the ideas, agreeing or disagreeing, solving problems, telling the stories, different types of discussions. The students work in groups, after that one student from each group is asked to sum up the discussion or to present the ideas expressed by group mates. Using this option the teacher can join any group to check the work of the students, to help them understand the task or to ask someone additional questions etc. Usually teacher coming to their group confuses the students. Thus, the best way to check how attentively they listen to each other and how actively they participate in the work is to ask students about the ideas expressed by any member from his or her group, or to know whose stories or facts are the most interesting or unexpected.

The assignment that can promote the collaboration of students deals with mind mapping. There are a number of resources that enable students to work together, to complete each other, to comment the captions made by the group mates. This assignment becomes more interesting when the task concerns the students specialty. The students practice such topics as: the internal and external structure of aircraft, technology and science, types of flying vehicles. The groups of students are asked to prepare their mind maps containing the terms or notions on the particular topics and present their work to the whole group during the zoom lesson. This activity helps to memorize new terms and common collocations, students can get better insight of the topic, also, they can comment on each other and add more detailed information or correct some options in the mind map. This activity was very interesting because students used different resources and different layouts of the material presenting. Also, they had different ideas what information had to be included in the maps. This assignment intends the work with dictionaries and authentic materials and engages all the students in the learning process.

One more resource that enables teacher to provide collaborative activities is the Padlet. This tool is widely implemented by the teachers and there are different possible ways how to use it in the course of distance learning. This resource introduces several interesting options. First of all, the teacher can choose the design

for the board, and set the options for students such as: comments, reactions. It is a simple tool that does not require much time to learn how to work with it. One more useful thing for teachers using the Padlet board is the fact that it can be automatically uploaded to your Googleclass. Moreover, it is an interactive tool which can be supplemented by visuals to make this board colorful, entertaining and interesting for the students. Also, Padlet can support the group community. It can be used during the practical classes and as a home project for individual and group work. The third year students were proposed to find and present information concerning the innovations in aviation. They introduced various facts, they used different information sources. Their posts were used for further discussions and expanding students' knowledge. The large amount of additional information helped to draw interest to the topic and resulted in debates. For the first and the second year students the assignments concerned the story completing. Doing such tasks students activate their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, use their imagination and creativity and train their writing skills. The teacher can use pictures to help students with some ideas and the order of the events in the story.

There are many resources that can be used by students for training their reading and grammar skills, for memorizing and categorizing new technical expressions or any words or collocations, for expanding vocabulary by matching similar and opposite meanings of the words etc. These tools are extremely helpful for students with low level proficiency and for those who wants to improve their personal language skills. In this case the students must have strong wish to work and study individually, to have a plan which includes the topics and timeline. Such measures enable students to be disciplined and responsible. Some resources have the option of sharing with other students. The teacher can propose the list of useful and simple resources which help students in learning.

The tool which is highly appreciated by the students is Quizlet. Its purpose is to make up cards to memorize the words. It has interesting options both for teachers and students such as: the use of definitions and synonyms of the words, supplementing the term with the picture, practicing the spelling and pronunciation of the term and checking the progress by doing the test based on the cards. This resource can be used during the lesson and for individual study. The cards can be made up by teachers or students. After learning and training the words, the students can be divided into teams to play the word game. But this option is possible only in class.

Modern students are very creative and ambitious. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills taking an active part in different events (competitions, conferences, workshops, seminars etc). The students can practice such activities as presenting something, reporting, instructing during English lessons. They are proposed the individual or group projects. Important and urgent topics result in students' engagement and keen interest in participating. An interesting topic of a project is only

a part of successful work. The students can be proposed to use the particular online tools to create impressed, interactive and colorful projects. This activity requires the work with different information resources, the collaboration, knowledge how to use the proposed tool. The students can be responsible for their part of the project or the can chose the leader of the team who can coordinate their work. Also, the can make the decision concerning the delivery of their project. The results showed that the work on the projects and their presenting help to animate the lesson, to motivate students to ask the questions and to add some details. To sum up the lesson and the information presented, the students are asked to write the review of the lesson. Sometimes, this task confuses the students because they know what film or book review is and do not understand how to do this task. The accurate instruction for the task and the list of main points will help students. Also, the students can assess the project delivered by their group mates. By means of this assignment the teacher can understand that students are the active and careful participants of the lesson, they are interested in the topic and the information they obtained.

One of the challenges of distance learning is testing. Teachers use resources for online testing. Not all the tasks can be transformed to online form. Some of the resources have limitations dealing with uploading audio or text materials; others have problems with grading the tasks. Taking into account the unusual conditions of studying, the teachers choose the most convenient resources. To obtain the most accurate results and to assess the students fairly, the teachers can choose the appropriate settings, limit the time of the test, delete the unknown users from the list. Actually, there are not many options to avoid cheating. Also, technical problems can interrupt the testing of the students. Trying several testing resources, it is possible to say that all of them have advantages and disadvantages. It depends on teachers and the purpose of the test what resource should be used.

Distance learning depends on the technology. Therefore, the tools that are integrated in the educational process must be affordable for teachers and students, simple to use, have useful options to create interesting tasks and activities. The role of the teacher is to choose the most appropriate ones, test them and propose to the students. Not all the tools can be accepted by the students. But the teacher can use the Google form to know students opinion. In fact, Google introduces a lot of services that can be used for learning. Google forms are a way to know someone's opinion or they can be used for testing. Students can use the option which allows them to make up mind maps and share this document. Google classroom is a service which is rather convenient for teacher and students. It is actively used for the first year students, as they have had the experience of using this resource (most of the schools used it during quarantine). Its greatest advantage is the clear system of assessment which matches the rating system of the Institute. The attached files with the assignments can be done for every student. The links to different resources can be attached

to the topics or subtopics of the class. Some students indicated that this service is more comfortable and simple than Moodle distance courses. The students can join Google class using their email and the access code, while in the case of Moodle, the administrator can join them to the service. The students have to remember their login and passwords and the teacher give them the access to the particular course. This procedure can take some time that is not convenient for the students.

Considering different tools and services it is possible to say that distance learning can be effective and it can transform the studying process into the exciting event accompanied by interesting materials, visuals, collaborative activities, peer assessing.

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