Effectiveness of Students' Distance Learning in English Business Communication: The Experience of Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design

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Abstract
Having the epidemiological situation caused by the spread of coronavirus, distance learning has become highly relevant in the world and Ukraine since 2020. Therefore it has become significant to identify, describe, and analyse the parameters of the correspondence of predicted and diagnosed educational results in distance learning in general English, English for specific purposes and business communication. The main aim is to outline strategies for increasing the effectiveness level of such activities. To obtain data to determine the effectiveness of distance practical classes, there have been used the results of regular final tests of the level of skills formation in vocabulary, grammar, reading, speaking, listening, and writing among 200 Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design students. These results were taken at the end of the spring semester of the 2019/2020 academic year and the autumn semester of the 2020/2021 academic year to compare with the same indicators of classroom studies in the autumn and spring semesters of the 2018/2019 academic year. To determine the degree of satisfaction with online learning of the English language, a survey of 20 teachers and 200 students has been carried out. It has been proved that distance learning is able to successfully solve a wide range of problems maintaining the quality of education while adapting lingua didactic science to the current information educational conditions and the development of new teaching methods.
Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, face-to-face learning, general English, English for specific purposes, quality of education, Ukrainian high school students.

Introduction

Within the conditions of the epidemiological situation caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, since 2020, the work of institutions of higher education in 165 countries of the world has been transferred to distance learning. This type of interaction between teachers and students has become highly urgent during the last two academic years in different countries in general and in Ukraine in particular. It has provoked extensive heated discussions about the prospects for developing education and the means of measuring its effectiveness both among the general public and in the professional environment. This situation has outlined the exceptional universal value of the idea of teaching and stimulated attempts to theoretically comprehend the new educational reality for more than 1.5 billion schoolchildren and universities and the successful interaction of individuals in and with it. According to O'Hagan (2020), UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay stated that they had never before witnessed so big educational disruption. Scholars are increasingly reporting that the popularity of quality online foreign language learning is tremendously increasing, for example, Santos (2020) notes that effective educational strategies in this area are not only desirable or essential, but are becoming an integral part of teaching languages at the present stage.

The relevance of the study is due to the need to analyse the distance learning effectiveness in English of various specifics (general socio-cultural, professional communication, and business communication) among students of Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design (KNUTD) and outline the prospects for further implementation of the accumulated professional experience of the team of authors in modern realities. Thus, the purpose of the article is to identify, describe and analyse the parameters of the correspondence of predicted and diagnosed educational results in distance learning in general English, English for specific purposes, and business communication in KNUTD, as well as outline strategies for increasing the effectiveness level of such activities. The distance learning model of KNUTD students in English was a set of educational activities, including, firstly, the use of online conference services for practical group classes, individual consultations and part of the controls requiring the participation of a teacher, and secondly, the use of the Moodle educational platform to create, placement and development of elements of electronic educational resources, as well as the implementation of self-control and test control activities. The working hypothesis is based on the consideration that the effectiveness of teaching English is a multifunctional multidimensional system that characterizes the qualitative level of achievement of learning outcomes. Performance can be assessed by analysing objective and subjective indicators. As objective ones, we will classify the level of formation of the necessary competencies in students and the quality of scientific and methodological support of the taught discipline, and as subjective ones the satisfaction degree with the activities of all stakeholders of the educational process (first of all, students and teachers). Following E. Polat, we understand the quality of education as "such an organization of interaction between a teacher and students, that is ... reflecting the needs of modern society and predictable competencies that should be possessed by education institution graduates to be competitive in a developing society" (Polat, 2005, p. 72).

Literature Review

The global trend towards education informatization, the synthesis of the best traditions of classical work in university classrooms, and modern technologies to improve education today is

evident. In 2002, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine launched an experiment to introduce distance learning in a number of universities in the country, and the main idea of the Davos Roundtable in 2013 was the thesis that the future belongs to online education and the intellectualization of society (Karpenko, 2018). The problems of modern technologies are widely represented in the works of many scholars (Bartley & Golek, 2004; Polat, 2005; Singh & Hurley, 2017; Sussman & Dutter, 2013; Zaychenko, 2003). In these works, the signs of distance learning effectiveness are systematized, including those in comparison with traditional full-time forms. Scholars like Brusilovsky, Karagiannidis & Sampson (2004) and Singh & Hurley (2017) argued about the relevance of this learning format, prove the promise of building an adaptive e-learning system (Zimina, 2005), trace the dependence of the psycho-emotional state of students on different forms of education and point to positive aspects of the impact of online learning (Marchuk, 2013). Some scholars note that distance learning is not only inferior to traditional full-time education, but also allows democratizing the educational process, opening up access to educational materials (Chartrand, 2016), increasing student coverage and overall work productivity up to 15% (Chirikov, Semenovs, Maloshonok, Bettinger, & Kizilcec, 2020), increase the active cognitive activity of students (Babelyuk, Koliasa, Kushlyk, & Smaglii, 2020), while other scholars remind that this form of education cannot wholly replace full-time education (Alzamil, 2021).

Potential recognition for distance learning effectiveness in foreign languages is based both on understanding the specifics of the subject and covering the essence of the entire spectrum of modern distance learning. This combines the possibilities of network education, including the use of videoconferencing services, and the information and educational environment of the university (Vladimirova, 2014). Strategies for teaching human speech activities (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) are the essence of successful teaching of a foreign language. Mastering it as a practical competence of performing an act of communication with its help comes out of the thoughts of academician Shcherba (2003) about the processes of formation of speech-thinking activity when teaching a non-native language. Unlimited Internet resources, information educational technologies, combined with the skill of a teacher, provide ample opportunities for successful learning foreign languages for active young people (Lestariyana, & Widodo, 2018).

It should be noted that the works we have reviewed devoted to the issues of distance learning of foreign languages in IHEs, are generally characterized by a common optimistic attitude. The researchers share the opinion of their colleagues, and at the same time, we believe that conducting scientific research that can comprehensively characterize the study of English by students in different countries and Ukraine is extremely important and productive both for a qualified analysis of the new educational reality in a pandemic, and for improving the teaching of language disciplines in the context of very active globalization processes including our country.

Methods

To develop a theoretical basis for the study, we have used the logical-theoretical analysis of scientific and methodological works. To determine the effectiveness of distance practical classes in general English, English for specific purposes, and business communication, there have been used the results of regular final tests of the formation level of lexical and grammatical skills, as well as reading, speaking, listening and writing skills among students of KNUTD at the end of the spring semester of 2019/2020 academic year and the autumn semester 2020/2021 academic year.

The points scored by students during this period of quarantine restrictions were compared using comparative analysis, both with each other and with the issues for similar work performed by students studying in the traditional full-time format in the corresponding semesters of the 2018/2019 academic year. To determine the satisfaction degree of the participants in the educational process with the results of activities in studying the English language, we used the method of questioning academic staff and students of the institution of higher education. The method of systematization, generalization, and interpretation of the collected data has been used to summarize the results of this study and designate promising areas for further work in this direction.

Participants

Among the participants of the compulsory semester final tests for the formation level of speech skills of English, 200 undergraduate and graduate students of KNUTD aged from 17 to 27 years old (an average age 23.2 years) of different genders were randomly selected, who studied in classrooms in the autumn and spring semesters 2018/2019 academic year, as well as remotely in the spring semester of the 2019/2020 academic year and the autumn semester of the 2020/2021 academic year, learning general English, English for specific purposes, and business communication following the work program of the main specialties. Thus, the total number of students was 200 people, including 50 people who studied during each of the mentioned semesters, which provided a representative sample. The test takers' level of English proficiency ranged from threshold to advanced.

The questionnaire on the personal assessment of online learning effectiveness has been attended by 20 teachers who provide English language teaching and 200 university students.

Instruments

Standard final semester tests to determine the formation level of speech skills in English have been developed by teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages of the University following the requirements of the European scale of language competence, internal characteristics, and content of the educational process. The work consisted of a system of tests and open-ended assignments in general English, English for specific purposes, and business English for one to four year undergraduate and one year graduate students, a total of eight possible sets of final works (one set for each of the seven semesters of English bachelor's and one master of one semester). The material for each test consisted of 40 to 50 tests and tasks of the required level of complexity. Students were allotted a standard time to complete the work: for each of the closed-type tests with the choice of one or more correct answers, establishing correspondences and logical sequence regarding the use of English vocabulary and grammar, understanding the information read and heard one-two minutes, for reading texts and listening to them five-seven minutes, for preparing oral statements and their presentation five minutes, for writing open-type assignments 15-25 minutes.

Questionnaires for teachers and students included questions regarding the content and organizational aspects of the distance learning process. Conducting such questionnaires with adjusting the pool of questions regarding the current situation is constantly practiced by the Department of Foreign Languages to ensure student-centrism and improve the quality of teaching.

The questionnaire offered the following options: *unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, excellent*. Students were asked five questions: *Evaluate your attendance in distance learning English; Assess the level of provision of educational materials provided by your teacher; Assess your progress in distance learning English this semester; Evaluate the conformity of your opinion about your knowledge and the points you have gained according to the results of the final testing; Assess your level of motivation to keep learning English online.* The respondents from among the academic staff were also asked five questions: *Evaluate the attendance of distance learning English by your students; Assess the level of teaching materials you are preparing for your students; Rate your students' average distance learning progress in English this semester; Evaluate the overall effectiveness of distance learning English versus classroom; Assess your level of motivation to continue teaching English online.* In addition, both students and teachers were asked to give a detailed answer to an additional question: *What you liked and disliked about distance learning English; If distance learning is more difficult for you than traditional one, what you would like to improve in the educational process.*

Research Procedures

Final testing procedures for subtests with automatic verification to determine the level of lexical and grammatical skills, reading and listening of students in general English, English for specific purposes, and business communication were carried out by teachers in their study groups at the end of each of the four mentioned semesters 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021 academic years using the capabilities of the Moodle KNUTD training system. Such a situation has increased the objectivity level of the assessment procedure. To perform subtests for diagnosing competencies in the field of speaking and writing, as part of the final tests, work in classrooms with full-time training or the use of Internet conference services for distance learning was practiced. The assessment of each of the final testing subtests of each of the semesters of each of the 200 participants in the sample was carried out according to a 100-point system following the scale of dependence of assessments on the quality of learning material at the university: 0-59 points *unsatisfactory* (F, FX), 60-63 points *enough* (E), 64-73 points *satisfactory* (D), 74-81 points *good* (C), 82-89 points *very good* (B), 90-100 points *excellent* (A). To compare the results of reflecting the formation level of the skills in using vocabulary and grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing by students, we derived the arithmetic mean of the final test points scored by each of 50 students who studied general English, English for specific purposes, and business communication during the period of four compared semesters (two autumn and two spring) of the academic year.

A survey of both students and teachers to determine the satisfaction degree with the results of studying and teaching English was carried out anonymously at the end of each semester after writing the final controls. The researchers calculated the distribution of four possible answers to each of the questions in percentage, and also analysed the detailed comments of the respondents.

Results

The success of teaching English concerning the types of speech activity and questioning of KNUTD respondents in the specified period of the study are presented in Table one, Table two, and Table three, Table four, respectively.

The effectiveness of regular final testing of the formation degree of speech skills in English among KNUTD students

We focused our attention on analysing the academic performance in the English language of students in semesters in which training was carried out in a situation of forced social distance relative to the overlapping semesters of classroom practical classes.

Table 1. *Results of the final testing in the spring semesters of distance learning and classroom learning*

	Distance Learning: Spring Semester 2019/2020	Classroom Learning: Spring Semester 2018/2019
The formation degree in vocabulary and grammar skills, the average score	70	73
The formation degree in reading skills, the average score	72	76
The formation degree in listening skills, the average score	64	66
The formation degree in speaking skills, the average score	75	75
The formation degree in writing skills, the average score	63	64
The overall result of the final testing, the average score	69	71

Let us keep in mind that in the spring semester of the 2019/2020 academic year, which coincided in time with the first strict lockdown in Ukraine, there was a general slight decrease in the success of teaching English in almost all types of speech activity (the average score of the final test result was two points lower) to compare with the indicators of the same semesters. This can logically be explained by psycho-emotional stress among participants in the educational process. The final test scores, registering the degree of formation of students' speaking skills, remained at the same level. We associate this with the logical increased need of students for communication, including in a foreign language, which influenced more thorough performance of tasks that develop this competence. It also follows from the data in Table one that distance teaching of the English language at KNUTD was rather quickly built, and this, in turn, provided a relatively insignificant decrease in the average scores that diagnosed the formation level of speech competence and provided the prerequisites for stabilizing the general educational situation.

As can be seen from the data in Table two, the effectiveness of distance learning in English at KNUTD in the autumn semester of the 2020/2021 academic year tended to strengthen and increase.

Table 2. *The results of the final testing in the autumn semesters of distance learning and classroom training*

	Distance learning: autumn semester 2020/2021	Classroom training: autumn semester 2018/2019
The degree of vocabulary and grammar competencies, the average score	71	72
The degree of reading skills, the average score	74	75
The degree of listening skills, the average score	65	70
The degree of speaking skills, the average score	75	73
The degree of writing skills, the average score	66	63
The overall result of the final testing, the average score	70	71

The gap between the final testing results of a semester of online education with the same indicator of the full-time semester was reduced to one point. In addition, the average score of the overall final testing result of the second semester of distance learning (the autumn semester 2020/2021 relative to the spring academic year 2019/2020 increased by one point.

Among the types of speech activities in English, which caused the most significant difficulty for students over two semesters in the distance education format, the development of listening and writing skills should be called. At the same time, the test results in using vocabulary and grammar in the second semester improved due to the operational development and implementation of a system of training exercises with the possibility of self-testing, which were able to consolidate this competence.

The results of the survey of students and teachers in KNUTD to determine the satisfaction level in the results of distance learning and teaching English.

As can be seen from the systematized data analysis in Table three and Table four, the overall satisfaction level of both groups of stakeholders in the educational process we have considered under the conditions of intensifying quarantine measures in 2020 remained reasonably high and tended to increase.

Table 3. *Results of students' survey*

	Distance learning: spring semester 2019/2020				Distance learning: autumn semester 2020/2021			
	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactorily	Good	Excellent	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactorily	Good	Excellent
Evaluate your attendance in distance English classes,%	1	25	50	24	2	30	48	20
Estimate the level of educational materials provided by the teacher,%	2	15	68	15	1	10	64	25
Evaluate your progress in learning English in a distance format this semester,%	1	50	42	8	1	43	51	5
Evaluate the conformity of your opinion about your knowledge and the points gained according to the results of the final testing,%	2	15	68	15	—	10	80	10
Evaluate your level of motivation to continue learning English online,%	1	17	64	18	1	10	69	20
The overall result of satisfaction with the distance learning,%	1	25	58	16	1	21	62	16

Students were generally satisfied with both the learning materials provided and their class attendance and progress in learning English. Students showed high positive feedback regarding their motivation to continue distance learning compared to teachers.

Table 4. *Results of the teachers' survey*

	Distance learning: autumn semester 2019/2020				Distance learning: spring semester 2020/2021			
	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactorily	Good	Excellent	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactorily	Good	Excellent
Evaluate the attendance of distance English classes by your students,%	4	41	40	15	4	31	45	20
Evaluate the level of educational materials you prepare for your students,%	–	20	60	20	–	8	62	30
Evaluate the average progress of your students in learning English in a distance format this semester,%	4	56	30	10	4	53	33	10
Evaluate the overall effectiveness of distance English learning in relation to the classroom training,%	10	22	60	8	6	28	54	12
Evaluate your level of motivation to continue teaching English online,%	10	22	58	10	5	27	53	15
The overall result of satisfaction with the distance learning,%	6	32	50	12	4	29	49	18

Teacher respondents were more critical than students in assessing student's overall online attendance and overall progress in learning English, commenting on the need to develop time management skills. Academic staff evaluated teaching materials they offered to students at a high level and noted that in the second semester they were able to significantly improve their quality. The overall effectiveness of distance learning activities in English concerning the traditional full-time format raised great doubts in the first of the semesters. With the acquisition of experience in conducting online classes, the share of positive responses in the second semester increased.

In addition, the researchers obtained different valuable information from the answers to the following questions: *What you liked and disliked about distance English learning; Whether distance learning is more difficult for you compared with the traditional one; What you would like to improve in the educational process.* Thus, students noted an increase in the volume of individual work, difficulties in mastering theoretical material without the usual contact with the teacher. Many students in their responses drew attention to the desire of teachers to maintain a comfortable psychological climate and provide comprehensive operational support to students. Some international students who studied English as a language of everyday communication and

obtaining higher education spoke positively about the initiative of their teachers to introduce elements of linguistic and cultural studies into the English course, offering educational materials about Ukrainian cities, sights, writers, and pillars of culture (for example T. Shevchenko, L. Ukrainka, L. Borovykovsky, etc.) in the classroom to facilitate the adaptation of international students in the host country.

Teachers expressed considerations regarding the need to improve technical support, the complexity of full-fledged work from home, and the increased workload, and also noted a tendency of a more conscious attitude towards learning English and an increase in the overall motivation of students to learn.

In general, respondents from both groups expressed a relatively high degree of satisfaction with the results of distance learning and mentioned the desirable combination of full-time training and elements of distance work on an ongoing basis.

Discussion

The study of the effectiveness of distance practical classes in general English, English for specific purposes, and business communication made it possible to identify and analyze the factors affecting the quality of education in this form, see its problem issues, and outline the ways of its improvement.

Considering difficulties working on certain types of speech activity during two semesters of distance learning revealed that problems in listening to an authentic foreign language text could be due to both technical reasons (the state of the equipment used in distance learning), and insufficient experience of listening to natural-sounding speech in English and immersion in the appropriate language environment for students. In addition, it was revealed that improving writing skills requires both special attention from the teacher and students and a long time of practice. To improve the results during the analyzed period of distance learning, students were getting individual consultations on this competence development. Students transformed the read and heard texts and created their statements in writing. As can be seen from the final testing, this work has shown its effectiveness and prospects.

The results of the survey support the information received by Alzamil (2021) from his respondents that online education, with all its advantages, cannot completely replace classroom training. The general indicator of satisfaction with the results of distance learning increased in the second semester in both groups of respondents. It depended both on objective reasons (availability of technical resources, provision of educational and methodological materials of adequate quality, clear organization of a smooth online learning process) and subjective (maintaining self-discipline and the level of motivation, the formation of correct self-evaluation, and the favorable microclimate in the academic group). For example, distance learning allowed teachers to widely use educational multimedia presentations and students to perform several communicative tasks such as a project and a report without additional technical difficulties that could arise in the classroom, which, in turn, positively influenced the overall motivation to continue the activity.

Mastering the discipline of general and special English as well as business communication in the context of online interaction of stakeholders involves the development of students' skills in foreign language communication. All these are also closely connected with the acquisition and improvement of the competencies of the ability to work with a PC, a global computer network, an educational environment, services for web conferences, electronic databases and other various data carriers as a means of receiving, processing and managing information. As the proportion of students working independently in online learning environments increases significantly and stress levels can increase (Babelyuk et al., 2020), it is crucial to provide well-adapted learning resources for online learning and develop students' overall digital literacy.

The results of our study revealed that when developing a successful strategy for teaching English in the course of teaching in a distance mode, it is necessary to take into account that components such as goals, principles, and learning outcomes should remain unchanged. At the same time, the ways of their implementation may change the influence features of the new e-learning form. The researchers agree with the researcher Zimina (2005), who noticed that in the situation of informatization of education, the principles of scientific thinking, consistency, activity, visibility, differentiation, individualization, and student-centred learning are combined with the code of creating an information educational environment, and modeling foreign language communication. Our research also showed that to achieve the predicted results of distance learning successfully, the presentation and development of English-language information resources and authentic teaching materials of various levels of complexity must be carried out under the supervision of a teacher and in a situation of structured online classes. Effective lessons that are conducted using web conferencing services should be as close as possible in structure to classroom ones and include the same stages as traditional classes with a teacher: speech exercises, presentation of lexical and grammatical material, development of skills of all types of speech activity, control the formation of skills and abilities. In addition, to implement the practical goal of learning all kinds of speech activities in English (use of language, reading, listening, speaking, writing), one should strive to harmoniously use such a distance learning form that intelligently combines asynchronous (placing programs, guidelines, list of recommended literature, electronic versions of training module materials, links to additional resources, tests, etc. in the modular environment) and synchronous (videoconferencing) teaching.

Conclusion

Based on the data obtained from the conducted research, we concluded that the model of the organization of distance learning English at KNUTD in modern realities in general allowed to build a full-fledged educational process at a level sufficient to implement its stated goals, to maintain the degree of such training effectiveness with a tendency to its increase and for the overall satisfaction of stakeholders.

It has been proved that distance education can successfully solve a wide range of problems while maintaining the quality of education, adapting lingua didactic science to the current information educational conditions, and developing new teaching methods.

To continuously improve the local results of students' speech skills among further research prospects; we have planned a comparative pairwise study of the corresponding results of the final

language tests in English for each year student groups who studied during the quarantine period and before it.

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