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## **BLENDED TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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This article analyzes the use of information technologies in the context of a blended technology approach to learning foreign languages in higher education institutions. Distance learning tools can be categorized as being synchronous (webinar, video conferencing, case-technology, chat, ICQ, Skype, interactive whiteboards) or asynchronous (blogs, forums, Twitter, video and audio podcasts, wikis, on-line testing). Sociological and psychological aspects of their application in the educational process are also considered.

**Keywords:** distance education technologies, the blended model of learning, distance learning, information and communication technologies, webinar, blog, forum, video conferencing, chat, intercultural competences.

## **СМЕШАННАЯ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ**

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В статье проанализированы особенности использования информационных технологий в смешанной модели обучения иностранным языкам в высших учебных учреждениях. Формы электронного обучения разделены на синхронные (вебинар, видеоконференция, case-технологии, чаты, ICQ, SKYPE, интерактивные доски) и (асинхронные средства: блоги, форумы, твиттеры, видео и аудио подкасты, вики, on-line тестирование).

Охарактеризованы социологические и психологические аспекты их применения в образовательном процессе.

**Ключевые слова:** дистанционные образовательные технологии, смешанная модель обучения, электронное образование, информационно-коммуникативные технологии, вебинар, блог, форум, видеоконференция, чат, межкультурные компетенции.

Federal Law N 273-FZ “On Education in the Russian Federation”, dated December 29, 2012, clearly defines distance learning and distance education technologies. Distance learning provides educational activities using databases of information to form a set curriculum. Information technologies and equipment are used to for the processing of these databases, and information and telecommunication networks ensure the transfer of these data, and the necessary interaction, between students and faculty members. ‘Distance education technologies’ are associated with information and telecommunication networks which facilitate the indirect interaction between students and faculty members [1].

When implementing a curriculum by means of distance learning or distance education technologies at a university or other educational facility, an appropriate level of online awareness must be created. The required online awareness environment shall include: online information resources, e-learning resources, and a number of information technologies, telecommunication technologies and relevant technological tools, which shall ensure learning by the students of the curriculum regardless of their location [1].

Increasing cultural diversity, integration and internationalization in different walks of life have raised standards in the quality of foreign language teaching in non-linguistic educational institutions. Recently, many innovative distance learning methods, using modern information technologies, have been used in the teaching of foreign languages. E-learning, along with traditional teaching methods, together

constitute blended technology of learning. The following tools have already become integral to the distance learning of foreign languages:

- Synchronous learning tools (messengers, ICQ, Skype, interactive whiteboards); and
- Asynchronous learning tools (blogs, forums, tweets, video and audio podcasts, wikis, online testing).

Such terms as ‘webinar’ may be categorized as both synchronous and asynchronous e-learning. When students participate in an online webinar, (i.e. when they listen to the lecturer live and may ask questions via messenger), this is synchronous learning. If the webinar recording was downloaded some time ago, then the asynchronous type of e-learning is being used.

All of the above methods are increasingly supplementing traditional foreign language learning methods. They help to improve communication skills and foreign language speaking skills, and also develop independent decision-making for communicative, cognitive, academic, and research purposes. Such a diversified approach to foreign language learning is a reflection of the complexity of international and cross-cultural communication, and both increases students’ motivation to receive professional knowledge and qualifications, and contributes to the development of their intellectual and creative potential.

Distance learning provides students with the opportunity to discuss up-to-date issues on forums, listen to webinars on a number of topics, communicate via email, gain access to learning aids, carry out online tests, obtain and use up-to-date professional data from specialized websites and e-resources, etc.

In the process of distance learning, the tutor or lecturer performs the role of an initiator of teamwork and coordinator of a learning process for a group of students, regardless of the technologies, techniques or methods to be used. The new form of communication allows us to increase students’ interest in classes and seminars, as well as to increase attendance thereof and save learning time.

A webinar is an online seminar that provides the tutor with the opportunity to transfer information and give assignments. At the same time, it provides the participants with the opportunity to receive information and to learn by means of a virtual class where they are able to hear and see one another from any part of the world. Especially important aspects include the capability of the application that facilitates the webinar to be able to show information to the participants, use an interactive whiteboard, and conduct interviews and discussions live. For the purpose of better interaction with, and feedback from, the audience, the participants should be able to ask questions in a message box. Setting up dialog with the students using modern smart technologies allows e-learning to be conducted by means of well-known distance learning tools, and also enables the organization of online video conferences. The use of modern communications technologies allows us to increase young students' interest in classes, and also increases attendance thereof and saves time.

Having a diverse range of visual aids, webinars are an effective distance learning tool for foreign languages.

With e-learning, students gain additional motivation for learning a foreign language, enjoy creative self-fulfillment, and establish intercultural communication.

The blended technology of traditional learning and distance learning methods allows students to see and hear one another, exchange data and at the same time process it online, thus moving long distance communication closer to direct live communication.

Students' involvement in innovative learning technologies:

- enables the development of cognitive activity;
- substantially increases interest in studies, and gives good results;
- helps and promotes the establishment of concepts and perceptions on a subject or phenomenon;
- activates the development of mental activities;

- results in the establishment of a number of abilities and skills;
- improves language pronunciation and intonation, as well as their accent when speaking.

The use of information technologies requires the active involvement of both students and teachers. The selection of information content and methods is also important.

The use of the model of distance learning for foreign language teaching should take into account the socio-cultural and psychological characteristics of the students.

The purpose of foreign language webinars, video seminars, and teleconferences is the development, establishment and revision of verbal and communication skills for foreign communication, intercultural competence and the development of professional competences. Students' attention is drawn towards languages' form and content.

Learning aids may be categorized as:

1. Informative: text, video and exercises, based on specific occupation-oriented and authentic linguistic and cross-cultural information;
2. Vocabulary training: updating vocabulary on a specific subject, e.g. business conversation, professional relations, general matters;
3. Speech practice: the learning of speech patterns, catch phrases, idioms, phrasal verbs;
4. Speech encouragement: provision of information that encourages action and requires understanding and discussion; organization of debates and validation of statements.

Especially interesting are speech exercises where students' attention is entirely drawn to the understanding, establishment and expression of ideas and statements.

Cognitive and communication exercises include:

1. Short answer questions: the student must give straight answers, based on the language used in the question.

2. Long answer questions: dialog is provided by the program, along with all possible answers to each question, so that it can identify and evaluate the answer's accuracy.
3. Multiple-choice questions: the student is provided with a number of answers, and must choose the right one.
4. Gap filling exercises: the computer gives a student a text, or a few sentences, with gaps. The objective is to fill in those gaps, using a clue in a form of words in the student's native language, which must be translated to a foreign language, using the right case. Also, the gaps may be filled in using words and phrases provided by the computer.
5. Vocabulary and self-assessment exercises: finding the correct word translation by connecting two sets of words in the native and foreign language, finding the correct equivalent, connecting two sets of words in a foreign language, finding pairs of synonyms or antonyms, or connecting foreign words with the right definitions thereof.

Based on the aforesaid, a conclusion may be made that distance learning is a rather effective form of foreign language learning, designed to develop an "inner speech" without which active oral speech, thinking in a foreign way and full written proficiency in a foreign language are impossible. In addition, time spent on foreign speech practice is increased, i.e. the practical aspects of learning are strengthened. Instead of emphasizing theoretical learning of a language, distance learning places an emphasis on the practical learning of a foreign language, general intercultural communication, and the establishment of tolerance towards different cultures, while preserving the ethno-cultural foundation of the native culture.

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