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Distance learning tools in teaching a foreign language and experience of their application in Karaganda Medical University

Abstract. *The article reveals an actual topic on the tools for distance learning of a foreign language. The main tools used by the foreign language teachers in the NC JSC «Karaganda Medical University» are described. The distance learning tools were divided into some categories according to their purpose: for online classes, for testing, for placing individual assignments for students' individual work, for quick interaction with students individually and in a group, and for written examinations. Based on the experience of their application, the main advantages and disadvantages of each of the presented tools are given. In order to identify satisfaction level of students with the distance learning tools the English teachers used and reveal difficulties the students had faced with during distance learning, the survey was carried out. Despite the fact that a great number of the respondents consider this format to be convenient, a number of problems have been identified that can affect the quality of education.*

Keywords: *distance learning, foreign language, tools, advantages, disadvantages.*

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Introduction

On the basis of the order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On strengthening measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection in educational institutions in a pandemic» dated 14.03.2020, students of VET, Bachelor, Master and PhD degrees levels were transferred to distance learning [1]. NC JSC «KMU» was not an exception. A huge amount of work has been done by the University administration and teaching staff to organize distance learning (DL).

Today our reality demonstrates the readiness of the University teaching staff for effective work in the new conditions due to the constant teaching staff development in the field of

information technologies, the possibilities of distance educational technologies, the proficiency of teachers in the basic tools for creating methodological and didactic materials. For NC JSC «KMU», the transition to full distance learning within the shortest time period became possible thanks to the distance learning system Moodle, IS Platonus, the university student web portal, and the corporate mail. Such an Internet resource as the electronic library, which all students and teachers have access to, has firmly entered the educational process of our university. There are electronic versions of most textbooks, educational and teaching aids.

The main feature of distance learning of a foreign language at a university is a mediated nature of telecommunication between a teacher

and a student and the limited opportunities for their interpersonal interaction associated with it. On the other hand, it is this study mode that allows maximizing the students' individual work, which is especially important in the conditions of university education, since a future specialist should be able to organize independently his cognitive activity [2].

Main part

The specificity of the subject «Foreign language» is primarily due to the fact that the leading component of the content of teaching a foreign language is not the basics of science, but teaching various types of speech activity, i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing. Distance learning assumes a different form of presentation of material and interaction between a teacher and a student. Undoubtedly, it is precisely in the conditions of university education that a conscious attitude to the learning process, a craving for self-education and self-realization, sufficient knowledge of a computer (PC skills) on the part of students are most likely [3]. From our point of view, distance learning is not just a new teaching form, but also a new form of education.

For the implementation of the educational process, the teachers of the foreign languages subdepartment of the Center for Foreign Languages of NC JSC «KMU» use the following distance learning tools:

- for online classes – Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex Meetings, Zoom (rarely);
- for testing – Moodle, Google forms;
- for placing individual assignments for students' individual work – Platonus, Moodle;
- for quick interaction with students individually and in a group – WhatsApp, Outlook mail;
- for written examinations – Session, Turnitin.

The majority of English teachers (67%) prefer the Cisco Webex Meetings platform for online classes and note the following advantages. The desktop application allows starting a conference with a click of a button. During the presentation, you can see all conference participants, supervise

their work, see their reaction. There is an opportunity to divide students into groups with a specified number of people and even the team in each of them, to join each group during the discussion, to assist, guide, and answer questions. The students themselves can «call» a teacher to the group if necessary. An important function is the ability to conduct surveys, which can be created on site or in advance using the Polleditor program, to save students' answers, demonstrate them and sort out difficult questions or mistakes. It is possible not only to record a lesson, but also to choose a place to save it (in a computer memory or in the cloud). However, the students noted repeatedly the poor sound and image quality of a presentation. Also, the disadvantages include the quality of the mobile application (most students use mobile phones to join online conferences).

33% of the teachers of the foreign languages subdepartment use Microsoft Teams to teach online, and 10% use Microsoft Teams storing and sharing presentations and other educational materials needed by both students and teachers. The users note the following advantages. Firstly, it is the security of user data. Secondly, when explaining important material, both an owner of the team and any participant of the video conference can keep a record, which is saved and available to all participants (as opposed to Webex, where the recording is only available to a host). Thirdly, there are desktop and mobile applications that make it easier to connect to the conferences. You can create teams with each group, or you can create only one, the code of which will be the same for all students (and auditors), which greatly facilitates access. Fourthly, students note good sound and image quality without freezing. Among the shortcomings (quite significant for us), we can emphasize the fact that while screen sharing, the images of the participants in the video conference disappear and it seems you to be talking to yourself.

At first, for the rapid organization of the educational process, the entire teaching staff of the foreign languages subdepartment began to use Zoom, which has an intuitive interface, ease of use, and an add-in interactive board. But given the data security concerns, Zoom is less suited

for universities that prioritize user safety. In addition, the free version of the program limits the conference time to 40 minutes, which is not convenient for conducting even one 50-minute lesson.

The distance learning system Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) firmly entered the academic life of the teaching staff of our university long ago. The teachers of the foreign languages subdepartment uses Moodle mostly for students' individual work. Students submit their presentations attaching them. There is a possibility to check and mark them. Also, students take a test after each credit for self-control, while a teacher can mark mistakes and some points which to pay attention to in the future. We believe that it is an advantage that you can limit the testing time and the number of attempts. But at the same time, it is impossible to control who actually completes the task: the student independently or with the help of someone, whether he turns to Internet sources, which is undoubtedly a drawback of this distance learning system. The same thing happens in IS Platonus. Here a teacher has to rely only on the academic honesty of the students. The complexity of creating a course and loading test materials should also be attributed to the disadvantages.

All teachers of the foreign languages subdepartment actively use IS Platonus to upload various kinds of tasks that can be assigned both individually and for groups. We also consider as an advantage the fact that when assessing a student work, the grade is automatically posted in an electronic grade book, which saves time

significantly. However, voluminous video and audio material, presentations, the maximum file size of which exceeds 2048 kb, can only be attached as a link, which is also inconvenient. Nevertheless, it is an excellent tool for DL, for example, as additional assignments or makeup work of missed online classes.

It goes without saying that within the framework of DL with the impossibility of physical contact, you must always be in touch with your students. WhatsApp messenger helps with it, where each student can ask a question about assignments, inform about technical or other problems, and get an individual consultation. Also, a teacher can post homework, post audio or video material in a group, if there are difficulties with opening files in other sources used.

Corporate mail also helps to communicate with students: to remind about a video conference (if it is planned), a teacher can give a detailed commentary on the submitted work.

We had to look in a new way at exams during sessions. In language subjects, students take a 4-step exam, which includes speaking (online either on Webex or on Microsoft Teams), listening, reading and writing on Session and Turnitin.

Session is a special program which was developed by NC JSC «KMU». Exam material is uploaded into the program by university teaching staff remotely. Pictures, tables, audio or video materials can be attached to the exam questions. The program includes a proctoring system. During the exam, the program analyzes the students' actions, does not allow pasting information into the answer fields and copying questions. It also tracks the examinees' transitions

Отвѣты студентов										
№	Ид студента	Проверка	Статус	Количество слов	Индикаторы			Оценка	Комментарий	Проверяющий
					Общий	Интернет-источники	Другие работы			
1	151629	Проверен		53	31	0	31	99	1 - lexical mistake (+19%); 2, 3, 4, 5 - correct (+80%)	Сорокина Ольга Николаевна
2	169512	Проверен		27	0	0	0	99	1 - lexical mistake (+19%); 2, 3, 4, 5 - correct (+80%)	Сорокина Ольга Николаевна
3	169518	Проверен		52	81	0	81	100	Well done!	Сорокина Ольга Николаевна

Figure 1 – Session interface

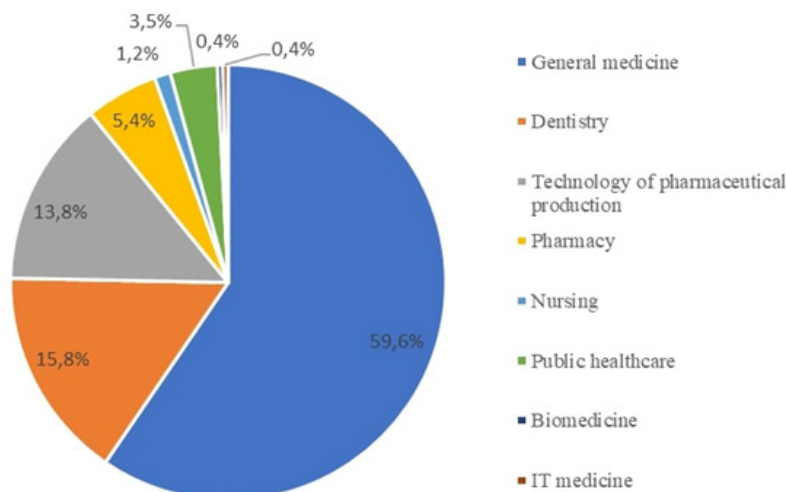


Figure 2 – The students' contingent

from the exam page, records violations and prepares reports.

The most important and notable point is the fact that when evaluating examination papers, a double-blind method of assessment is used: a random selection of exam questions and automatic coding of a student, so that examiners do not know whose work they are checking. Also, a reviewer can comment on a given grade (Figure 1).

Transmission of students' answers to the Turnitin anti-plagiarism system is automated, which allows examiners to receive student works with similarity index reports. However, for the exam in a foreign language, the use of Turnitin is not always informative, since, for example, listening or reading questions often have unambiguous answers. But even identifying the same errors in different student works does not allow to further reduce the score, since an examiner does not know who of the students cheated.

The Session program, updated in the 2020-2021 academic year, showed a number of advantages for teachers: uploading questions was simplified; it became possible to attach not only audio, but also video; grading is absolutely objective, since the questions are distributed automatically, and an examiner does not know either the name or the number of the group, and sometimes even the specialty (if we are talking about the discipline «Foreign language» as a component of the cycle

of general education disciplines and examination questions are attached at once for all specialties). Among the shortcomings, we can note that each answer is run through Turnitin (the data of which is not always informative for foreign language teachers), otherwise it is impossible to grade the work, and this takes a lot of time.

Methods

The questionnaire was used to identify satisfaction level of students with the distance learning tools the English teachers used and reveal difficulties the students had faced with. 260 first year students of NC JSC «KMU» were involved in the survey. The questionnaire consists of 6 questions. The following methods were used: analyzing, generalizing obtained data.

Results and discussion

Firstly, we had to clarify the contingent involved in the survey. As the diagram shows, the survey covers all the specialties at NC JSC «KMU» which have the discipline «Foreign language» in their syllabi (Figure 2).

To the question «Is it convenient for you to study a foreign language in the format of distance learning?», 184 students (70.8%) gave the affirmative answer (Figure 3). And they even like it. 60 respondents consider the format to be convenient but difficult. 11 students (4.2%)

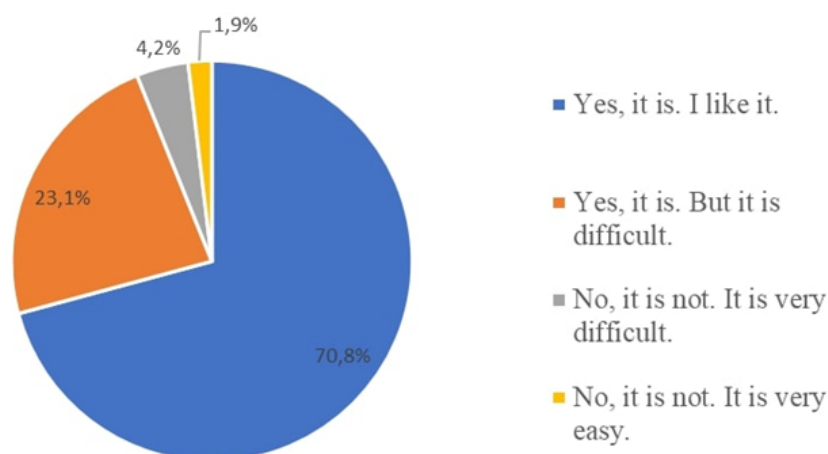


Figure 3 – Is it convenient for you to study a foreign language in the format of distance learning?

suppose that it is not convenient, and it is very difficult to learn a foreign language this way. Only 5 students think that studying a foreign language in distance learning is very easy.

241 people note that in their study Webex is used, while half of the respondents (130 students) choose Microsoft Teams as a DL tool. 45 students note Zoom as a platform for online lessons and Google Forms as a task tool (Figure 4). It is obvious that the choice of a tool is imposed by a teacher. But the results show that the most popular one, i.e. the most convenient, among platforms for online lessons is Webex. It also shows that the English teachers are not limited with the only

tool, they use different ones depending on the type of activity they would like to offer.

The survey participants marked the variety of activities the teachers used. 66.2% of students (172 people) and 58.8% (153 people) marked video lessons and online tests as the most often used forms of work (Figure 5). Online video lessons help practice speaking and listening skills more while online tests help not only a teacher, but also a student to evaluate how much the material has been learned and to fill the gaps in the future. The notable thing about activities is that assignments for self-control promote student independent work giving chance to train more in grammar or

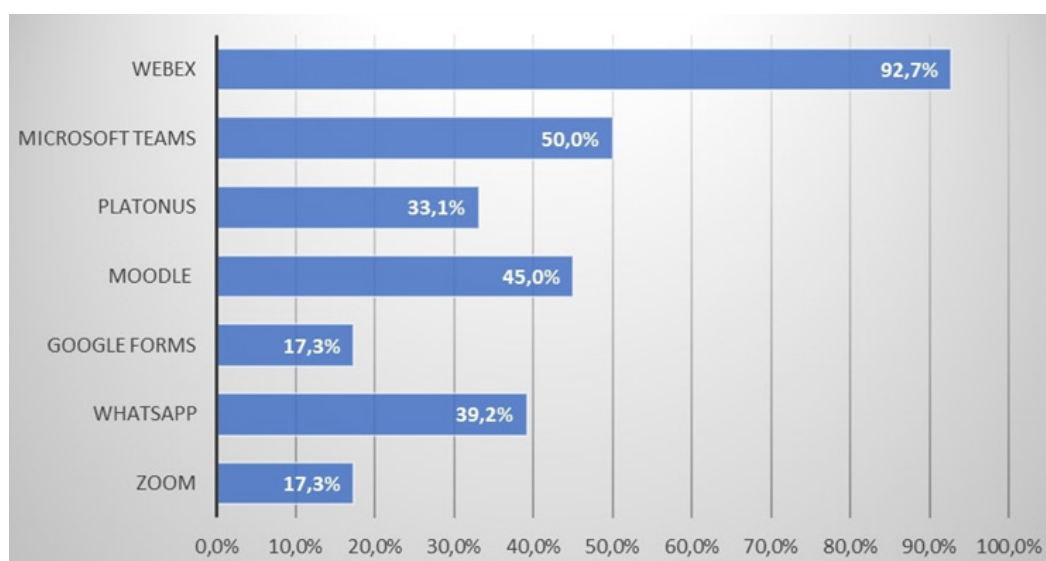


Figure 4 – What distance learning tools are used in the process of your studying a foreign language? (Several answers are possible.)

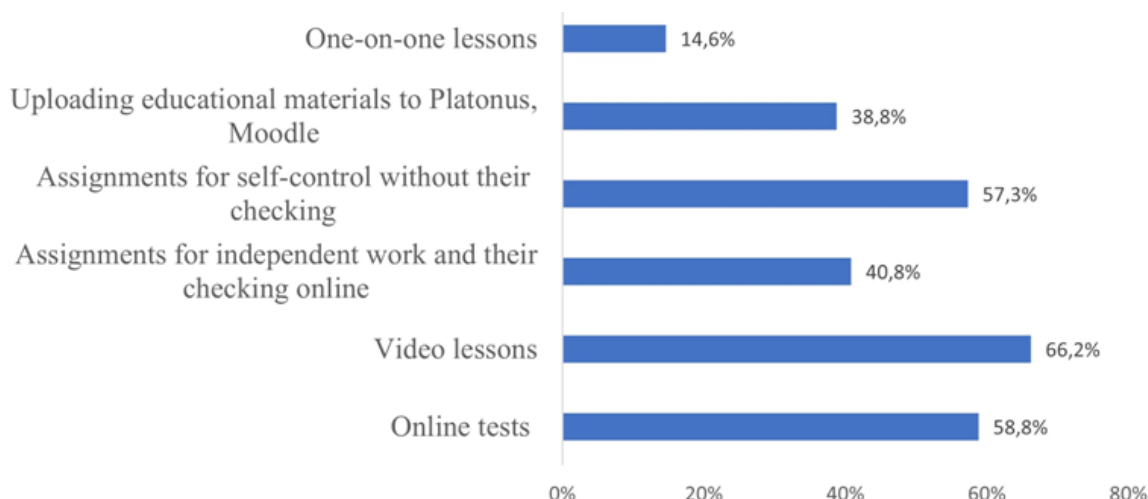


Figure 5 – What forms of activities are most often used by foreign language teachers in e- / distance learning? (Several answers are possible.)

vocabulary. The answers to the question «What technical problems did you face in the process of distance learning a foreign language?» reveal the problem with poor Internet speed which undoubtedly influenced the quality of perception of the material. 121 respondents chose this item. At the same time 101 students (38.8%) marked no technical problems (Figure 6). It depends on a place a student lives (if it is a city or a village) and an Internet provider he / she has.

The last question is devoted to the advantages and disadvantages of cloud platforms most frequently used by the teachers at NC JSC «KMU». Among advantages 81 students note

the availability of the mobile apps of both Webex and Microsoft Teams, and also both of them have user-friendly interface. But at the same time, the respondents mark that these applications sometimes lag because they require good Internet speed which is a big technical problem for almost half of the respondents according to the obtained data previously discussed. 92 students (35.4%) make a point that Microsoft Teams has always high-quality sound and image while Webex has sometimes poor sound and image with freezing. 25 students like Microsoft Teams more because they can download and attach presentations. 100 students (38.5%) prefer Webex as it is easier to

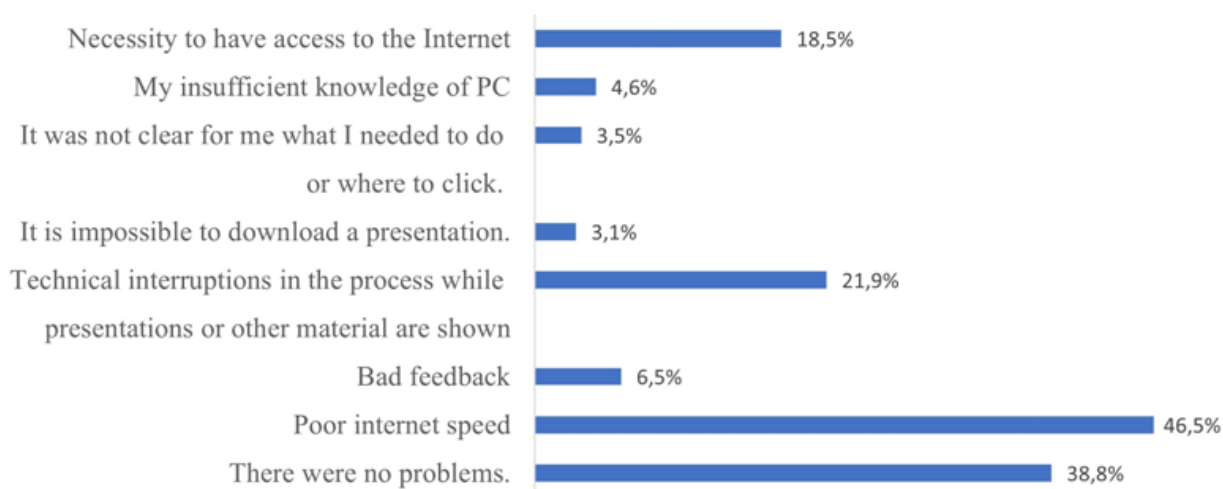


Figure 6 – What technical problems did you face in the process of distance learning a foreign language? (Several answers are possible.)

join a conference using the same link every time and during speaking activities you can see your partners even if a presentation is shown, while in Teams you cannot. As we can see, the opinions were almost equally divided. And it would be a good thing if teachers did not impose 'their' platforms but took into account the opinion of students on usability.

Conclusion

The survey conducted among the university students showed that to achieve language results, teachers use various distance learning tools from cloud platforms for video conferences to Moodle and Platonus for independent work. Remarkable was the fact that for most students, distance learning is a convenient way for studying a foreign language.

Of the activities, video lessons, which are conducted on two platforms, Webex and Teams, are predominant. Apart from advantages such as desktop and mobile applications, good interface, record function, etc., they have shortcomings.

The most obvious of them is that they require a high-speed Internet connection, which not all students have.

Thus, for studying and teaching a foreign language in NC JSC «KMU» within the framework of distance learning, the use of a set of tools contributes to the achievement of both personal and subject results, leading to the formation of the necessary competencies in students, developing language skills at all levels. At the same time, the quality of education directly depends on the platforms on which lessons are held. In other words, it is very important that the cloud platform, on which distance learning is carried out, is understandable, has a user-friendly interface and excellent sound and video quality. We believe that each of the platforms we have considered needs to be improved, and it is not possible to single out one of them as universal. Therefore, this places teachers before new challenges as improving teaching material and analyzing new technical means necessary for distance foreign language teaching or at least finding ways to adapt those already used.

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«Қарағанды медицина университетінде» КеАҚ шет тілін оқытудағы қашықтықтан оқыту құралдары және оларды қолдану тәжірибесі

Аңдатпа. Мақалада шет тілін қашықтықтан оқыту құралдары туралы өзекті тақырып ашылады. КеАҚ «Қарағанды медицина университетінің» шет тілі оқытушылары пайдаланатын құралдар қарастырылған. Мақсатына сәйкес қашықтықтан оқыту құралдары келесі категорияларға бөлінеді: онлайн сабақтар, тестілеу, студенттердің жеке жұмысы бойынша тапсырмаларды жүктеу, студенттермен жеке және топта қарым-қатынас жасау, жазбаша емтихандар. Оларды қолдану тәжірибесіне сүйене отырып,

ұсынылған құралдардың әрқайсысының негізгі артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктері келтірілген. Ағылшын тілі мұғалімдері қашықтықтан қолданған оқыту құралдарына студенттердің қанағаттанушылық дәрежесін анықтау және қашықтықтан оқыту кезінде студенттер қандай қиындықтарға тап болғандарын көру үшін сауалнама жүргізді. Көбінесе бұл форматты ыңғайлы деп санаса да, сонымен бірге проблемалар да анықталды.

Түйін сөздер: қашықтықтан оқыту, шет тілі, құралдары, артықшылықтары, кемшіліктері.

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Инструменты дистанционного обучения в преподавании иностранного языка и опыт их применения в НАО «Медицинский университет Караганды»

Аннотация. В статье раскрывается актуальная тема об инструментах дистанционного обучения иностранному языку. Описаны инструменты, используемые преподавателями иностранного языка в НАО «Медицинский университет Караганды». Инструменты дистанционного обучения были разделены на категории в соответствии с их целевым назначением: для онлайн-занятий, для тестирования, для размещения индивидуальных заданий по индивидуальной работе студентов, для быстрого взаимодействия со студентами индивидуально и в группе, для письменных экзаменов. На основе опыта их применения приведены основные преимущества и недостатки каждого из представленных инструментов. Для выявления степени удовлетворенности студентов инструментами дистанционного обучения, которые использовали преподаватели английского языка, и выявления трудностей, с которыми столкнулись студенты во время дистанционного обучения, был проведен опрос. Несмотря на то, что многие считают такой формат удобным, был выявлен ряд проблем, которые могут повлиять на качество обучения.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное обучение, иностранный язык, инструменты, преимущества, недостатки.

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