

Advantages And Disadvantages of Using Skype As A New Educational Tool During COVID-19 Pandemic Era*

Viktor A. IVANOV

Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Education "Kursk State Medical University", Kursk, Russia

Natalya V. PLAKSINA

Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Education "Kursk State University", Kursk, Russia

Maya V. OVCHINNIKOVA

Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Education "Kursk State University", Kursk, Russia

Correspondence should be addressed to: Viktor A. IVANOV; va_ivanov@mail.ru

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the description of Skype technologies usage in the process of teaching during COVID-19 pandemic era. Advantages and disadvantages of this form of distant education are reviewed in the article. The methods of teaching via Skype at the lessons are presented in the article.

Keywords: Skype technologies, distant education, video conference, technical means of teaching.

Introduction

The situation that has developed in the field of higher education today, due to the danger of the spread of a new coronavirus infection, forced university teachers to reconsider traditional approaches to teaching different disciplines, including foreign languages.

Nowadays, new information technologies have penetrated into all spheres of our life, including education. Information technologies provide teachers with the opportunity to organize the educational process rationally, to increase teaching effectiveness, using all types of sensory perception of students while working with multimedia content, to create an open education system that provides each individual with their own learning way.

The use of new information technologies can improve the quality of education, develop inclusive education and ensure equality in education, achieve optimal use of time, which allows the use of new information technologies as an additional method of teaching.

This article is devoted to identifying the advantages and disadvantages of teaching foreign languages via Skype video conferencing while working in small groups. Skype is a software application for online communication that can be used at different levels of foreign language learning and provides many opportunities for teaching and learning. Skype is a communication tool that allows users to make audio and video calls over the Internet.

Individual learning foreign languages via Skype is quite popular in the methodology of teaching foreign languages, but group learning via Skype is not sufficiently researched. There is a lot of discussion about the effectiveness of online

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classes in Skype, that they have their advantages and disadvantages. But the fact is that today, without online classes, the overall picture of modern linguistic techniques will be incomplete. If it were inconvenient for students, it is unlikely that such a method of obtaining knowledge would be so widespread nowadays.

Methods of the Investigation

In the course of the investigation there have been used empirical methods such as study and generalization of pedagogical experience in the sphere of distance education, observation of students' educational activities in the process of practical classes, analysis, generalization, and systematization of the achieved results.

Results of the Investigation

Skype is a telecommunications application that specializes in providing video chat, voice and video calls from computers, phones and other mobile devices via the Internet to other devices. Although Skype is a commercial product, its free version is increasingly used by teachers and students carrying out global educational projects. Skype gives teachers the opportunity to make their lessons more interactive and interesting.

Let's consider the visible advantages of using the Skype application in foreign language classes in small groups. Firstly, it is the possibility of interaction of students with a teacher in Skype from anywhere in the world at any time, as well as saving time on moving in a large metropolis. Wherever students are, they just need a laptop or smartphone and a good Internet connection to attend lessons with a teacher, it allows them to develop language skills in the most comfortable conditions for the student.

In their work "Dictionary of Methodological terms (theory and practice of language teaching)", leading methodologists dealing with the problems of teaching foreign languages, E. G. Azimov and A. N. Shchukin say that access to educational content at anytime and anywhere creates conditions for formal and informal learning, both in the classroom and outside it, and educational applications allow students to learn at their own pace, creating individual learning trajectories [Азимов 1999: 291].

The advantages of using Skype as a learning tool were most accurately described by Hashemi and Azizinejad, who pay attention to its characteristics such as ease of use due to the fact that each user has a personal presentation screen, full focus on the content presented on the student's computer, complete confidentiality, a variety of tools that allow you to share and reuse lesson content (audio recording, chat history), as well as the presence of multiple and parallel communication channels [Hashemi 2011: 5-53].

The essence of distance learning was described in 1999 by Weissberg, who states that the distance learning does not reproduce the actions that we usually perform in our regular educational activities, but rather invents another sphere of perception [Weissberg 1999: 14]. In this context, such types of speech activity as speaking, reading, listening and writing are different from those that we form during full-time training. According to Hampel and Stickler, an additional difference between remote communication and live communication is that when communicating using a computer, you can use oral language and body language, as well as a wide range of various audio-visual means (pictures, videos, etc.), allowing the interlocutors to realize a particular phenomenon in a different way [Hampel 2012: 116-137].

The use of modern technologies should also be included in a number of advantages when teaching a foreign language online. The teacher can send students a text document, a spreadsheet, an audio file, a link to a video or a presentation on the topic being studied at any time. Some of the teachers also use the opportunity to create personal dictionaries with a record of the pronunciation of new words. In addition, at the end of the lesson, the student has access to a list of words that he must remember for the next lesson. Audio recordings made with the teacher help him to repeat previously studied material online.

One more indisputable advantage of learning by means of Skype is due to the fact that communication is carried out from computer to computer, which allows students to connect to the lesson not only individually, but also several students can use one device for communication. Therefore, Skype can be used both for individual or group training, when students get in touch from different mobile devices, and the ability to teach a group of students who go online from one device as a group.

Moreover, the big advantage of learning on Skype is the absence of paper copies when using additional exercises in full-time classes. The need to copy the educational and methodological materials necessary for the lesson on a daily basis requires time and money. With online training, all exercises and homework can be simply attached electronically to an email.

Like any other method of learning foreign languages, Skype lessons have not only advantages, but also disadvantages. The main disadvantage of online learning is the lack of personal contact between the teacher and students. The disadvantages of learning via Skype also include the inability to control the actions of students on the part of the teacher. Thus, the main problem is that the teacher does not see what the student writes and cannot correct the error in time. In fact, when learning via Skype, you should use live communication more than develop writing skills. The student performs written grammar exercises independently, and at the beginning of the next lesson, the teacher points out mistakes, and then explains the new material. For clarity of the correction, you can use the Skype "Screen Demonstration" function, which replaces the real board in the audience.

Learning a foreign language via Skype largely depends on the correct operation of the equipment and a reliable Internet connection. Otherwise, effective lessons are impossible. Experienced teachers recommend using a headset for an easy learning process, so that background noise does not interfere with the lesson.

Despite the mentioned-above advantages of Skype and similar tools, some aspects of their use in educational contexts can be difficult, as both the teacher and the student must work in two places at the same time: a virtual space that is visible on a computer monitor, as well as in a real space where you can access various educational materials, such as dictionaries, books, notes, etc. as a result, the teacher is forced to integrate and perform actions of various nature simultaneously, such as moderating the conversation, observing himself and the student, managing tools and resources.

No less important are the psychological aspects of online learning. Traditional lessons contribute to greater concentration of attention at the lesson. When teaching via Skype, there is a risk that the student will be distracted by phone calls, relatives or neighbors entering the room during classes.

One of the most important advantages of a live lesson in psychological terms is the ability to get quick feedback, see the mood and paralinguistic behavior of the student. This feature is not lost in the Skype class, but it may be weaker. In addition, there are shy people or just those who prefer to study without a camera, but Skype gives you the opportunity to practice without seeing another person. A comfortable and relaxed state in the place where the student is comfortable also contributes to the effectiveness of learning process. Some psychologists suggest that the traditional form of training is more suitable for extroverts, and Skype is more suitable for introverts.

There are situations in which the lack of personal, live contact provided by online training is a necessary advantage: for people with disabilities, with certain diseases or injuries, during the recovery period, when you can practice without getting out of bed.

After analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of teaching and learning via Skype in comparison with traditional face-to-face lessons, we can come to the conclusion that using Skype has many potential advantages for both the student and the teacher, which in many respects outweigh the identified disadvantages. However, with the proper use of Skype or any other similar tool, communication skills of students in foreign languages can be significantly improved, and such training will also contribute to the professional development of teachers in the field of using new digital technologies in the classroom.

However, teachers who conduct classes online using Skype should follow the following rules when preparing for the lesson.

- Prepare for the lesson in advance; determine the goals and tasks facing you in this particular lesson.
- Create a working environment in the room where the lesson is being held. The room should be well lit.
- Check your microphone, speakers and webcam before the class so that they are in working condition.
- Make a clear lesson plan, limiting the time frame for each stage of the lesson.
- Send the materials necessary for the lesson
- Before the start of the lesson, there should be an organizational moment to check that all the students have got in touch and their devices are functioning normally, besides, that there are no extraneous noises.
- Integrate oral and written speech through the exchange of additional questions in the chat.
- Tasks for homework after an online lesson should be clear and well-understood; all instructions should be given during an online lesson.
- Set a clear time frame for when the homework should be sent to the teacher and the way in which students can send their homework to the teacher.

Conclusion

In general, Skype is considered by teachers and students to be a valuable tool for distance learning of a foreign language. However, its use in teaching has some disadvantages, such as weaknesses of the IT infrastructure (for example, interrupted connections), the lack of certain functions (for example, monitoring the contents of the student's screen) or the specific nature of communication with the interlocutor (lack of interaction in a common space). Criticism of distance learning via Skype can be considered as criticism related to distance learning in general, where each individual user is limited to his individual workplace. Therefore, Skype as a tool that is used universally in online foreign language teaching individually and in small groups, it is one of the most popular and convenient for distance learning.

As a conclusion, it should be noted that Skype is a unique and promising tool for learning a foreign language in modern conditions. Its potential capabilities are huge and are not fully used. Solving emerging problems, some of which were mentioned above, it can be used very effectively in the process of studying various aspects of a foreign language and achieving high results by increasing the motivation and cognitive activity of students, making it individual and mobile.

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