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THE USE OF DISTANCE LEARNING PLATFORMS IN ESL INSTRUCTION

The study outlines the challenges ESL students face in learning English at Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute when using online learning platforms and finds out ways to overcome them. The aim of this work is to review available e-learning platforms used to facilitate foreign language teaching process, analyze the opportunities and tools provided, study their combination with classroom work and the applicability of its use in post-pandemic era.

This work also investigates the effectiveness of combination of online and offline learning process and how beneficial it is to ESL students in learning English. The article reviews the possibilities provided by Moodle and Google Workspace distance learning courses on the basis of "Sikorsky" Distance Learning Platform supplemented with other online learning services. The implementation of E-learning at Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute is facing many difficulties which are not limited to academic challenges, administrative challenges and technical challenges.

The peculiarities of synchronous and asynchronous teaching of different language aspects such as pronunciation, speaking and listening are studied in the article. The results show the effectiveness of combination of online and traditional tools of teaching and the potential of virtual educational environments.

The study shows that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated, and a new hybrid model of education will emerge with significant benefits. The results of the study show that online learning will eventually become an integral component of education. One of the main advantages of e-learning for students is capability of adjusting learning to suit their individual needs and learning style. Students express the desire to stick to online learning tools in post-pandemic time which means that the organisation and realisation of the learning process were positively estimated by students.

Key words: *distance education, online learning tools, ESL teaching, distance learning platforms.*

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ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ПЛАТФОРМ ДЛЯ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ У ВИВЧЕННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

У дослідженні висвітлюються проблеми, з якими стикаються студенти під час вивчення англійської мови в Київському політехнічному інституті імені Ігоря Сікорського під час використання навчальних онлайн платформ та з'ясовуються шляхи їх подолання. Мета роботи – огляд наявних платформ дистанційного навчання, які використовуються для полегшення процесу вивчення іноземної мови, аналіз можливостей та інструментів, що дають ці платформи, вивчення їх поєднання з роботою в класі та можливість їх використання після повернення до традиційної форми навчання.

У роботі також вивчається ефективність поєднання онлайн та офлайн елементів навчання та наскільки це корисно для студентів у вивченні англійської мови. У статті розглядаються можливості дистанційних курсів Moodle та Google Workspace на базі платформи дистанційного навчання «Sikorsky» та інших сервісів онлайн-навчання. Впровадження дистанційного навчання в Київському політехнічному інституті імені Ігоря Сікорського зіштовхується з багатьма труднощами, які не обмежуються академічними, адміністративними та технічними аспектами.

У статті досліджуються особливості синхронного та асинхронного навчання різних мовних аспектів, таких як вимова, говоріння та аудіювання. Результати показують ефективність поєднання онлайн і традиційних засобів навчання та потенціал віртуальних освітніх середовищ.

Дослідження показує, що інтеграція інформаційних технологій в освіту буде ще більше прискорюватися, а також з'явиться нова гібридна модель освіти зі значними перевагами. Результати дослідження показують, що онлайн навчання з часом стане невід'ємною складовою освіти. Однією з головних переваг дистанційного навчання для студентів є можливість адаптувати навчання відповідно до їхніх індивідуальних потреб і стилю навчання. Студенти висловлюють бажання продовжувати користуватись онлайн засобами навчання і після повернення в аудиторії після пандемії, а це означає, що організацію та проведення навчального процесу студенти оцінили позитивно.

Ключові слова: дистанційна освіта, інструменти онлайн навчання, навчання англійської мови, платформи для дистанційного навчання.

Introduction. The need in successful international and interpersonal communication necessitates lifelong learning of foreign languages. Fast changes and modern trends in the English language studying are caused by the new challenges of the world such as the global COVID-19 pandemic which accelerated the transition to blended learning from traditional forms of learning used in the higher education system earlier. This has led to the use of information and communication technologies in education which allowed us to go far beyond the classroom.

The global pandemic has become a stimulus for the development of e-learning platforms on the basis of previously created learning management systems in many universities. These platforms facilitate educators' interaction with online learners, significantly help them to conceptualize diverse courses, course structures, syllabus and make educational process more flexible, convenient, accessible and tailored to students' needs.

All these things make the study of available online tools and platforms **relevant** as the changes the global pandemic has caused might be here to stay

and the shift from offline classroom to distance learning can impact the worldwide education. Besides, forced transition to distance learning due to quarantine restrictions showed the effectiveness of the platforms used in language learning, the potential of virtual educational environments and the need of their further development since they make it possible to deliver information diversely.

Thus, the **aim** of this work is to review available e-learning platforms used to facilitate foreign language teaching process, analyze the opportunities and tools provided, study their combination with classroom work and the applicability of its use in post-pandemic era.

Methodology. The transition to online was inevitable and many higher education institutions have taken advantage of online education opportunities which proved that traditional offline learning and e-learning can go hand by hand. During the quarantine all Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute students were exposed to work with Moodle and Google Workspace distance learning courses available on

"Sikorsky" Distance Learning Platform and master their English language skills with help of such popular nowadays services as MyEnglishLab, Classtime, Peardeck, Nearpod, Kahoot, Quizlet, Padlet during asynchronous learning. Such services as Webex, Google Meet, zoom, Skype were used for organizing the synchronous learning process which is an effective way for students-teachers interaction and makes learners engaged due to its convenience and wide range of possibilities they give. Both participants of the educational process, teachers and students, don't mind using technology for studying and working distantly. That's why blended learning, allowing a combination of online and traditional tools of teaching, has become so popular (Sokyrska, 2020).

Results and discussion. *The need to transfer to distance learning.* Distance learning has been the subject of scientific research (its pedagogical, technical, methodological and psychological aspects) since its emergence but the importance of this problem has risen due to the pandemic and strict restrictions it has led to (Goudeau, Sanrey, Stanczak, 2021). After sudden shift to distance learning due to the pandemic, many wondered if traditional education can withstand since big companies such as Google, LinkedIn Learning, EdX, Coursera, Khan Academy, Udemi ect. increased interest in online certificate programs which has led to massive spikes in the number of users.

In order to keep up with the latest trends and to support large-scale remote work, many large universities have introduced virtual learning environments. Stanford University, Harvard University, The University of Illinois, Cornell University, UCLA and Yale University are among institutions holding classes online.

Ukraine is not an exception. "Sikorsky" Distance Learning Platform was created by the largest technical university of Ukraine Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute to cope with a sudden shift to online instruction. This platform helps to organize online learning process, facilitates teacher-student interaction, provides the access to many resources created and developed by teachers which showed its necessity and effectiveness during the coronavirus pandemic.

The challenges we face due to sudden shift to online instruction. Although distance learning is ubiquitous nowadays, there are some obstacles to overcome. Not reliable internet access, especially in rural areas, and the lack of modern digital equipment or poor quality of hardware and software can significantly deteriorate the quality of the lesson. Learners from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds cannot equally use opportunities the digital learning provides. It is an essential obstacle in case of synchronous learning when live classes are conducted by educators. This problem can substantially increase the achievement gap and may lead to the situation when students are unevenly prepared and supported (Sokyrska, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that both students and teachers face problems while working distantly. The first problem teachers faced was the lack of awareness and knowledge regarding ways to implement online learning tools into distance learning process and uneven level of readiness of teachers to conduct the educational process online. Distance learning is a relatively newly implemented system in Ukraine and many teachers as well as students had difficulties in learning to use different features of various educational platforms. It took some time to adapt psychologically to new way of learning. Professional development courses in the sphere of mastering and implementing online learning tools and compulsory training of teaching staff to equip them with e-teaching skills is considered to be effective in solving this problem.

A sudden shift to online teaching made teachers to work predominantly via digital resources. The use of online learning tools is meant to enhance distance learning process although another important aspect which may cause significant challenges is the lack of time needed for developing distance academic material and learning content (Lockee, 2021). Though not all disciplines are provided with enough amount of resources and assignments, assessment tests and online exams. Teachers cannot fully rely on one coursebook and have to supplement their teaching materials with different books, e-sources, articles while preparing their classes.

The lack of interaction between students and teachers during online classes is another important issue which should be paid attention to. The lack of face-to-face interaction leads to lower learners' engagement in group work in case of synchronous learning that is why teachers must constantly invent creative ways to involve all students in practical activities. Another negative aspect which should be to taken into account is that practical English classes can be sort of a one-way communication if the group is too big.

Online opportunities that we have now. Along with the challenges we faced due to the quarantine restrictions some advantages also came up. One of the positive aspects is the fact that higher education institutions in Ukraine started building reliable distance learning platforms for providing high quality online studying which can also be used in post-pandemic period as a tool for blended learning. It means that distance learning can be supplemented by face-to-face classes which will definitely enhance and facilitate teacher-students' interaction and provide educators and learners with new opportunities.

Many students still do not prefer full online education in the future, that is why supplementing online learning with materials available remotely is considered as a positive aspect which facilitates online and offline form of information delivery. Ukrainian "Sikorsky" Distance Learning Platform provides students with the opportunity to access lectures, distance courses and other academic materials at any convenient time. This allows students to learn at their own pace, go over the provided materials, skip or accelerate through concepts as many times as they need for better understanding. The most often used learning management system in Ukraine is Moodle because of the availability of desktop and mobile versions, its functionality and easy integration with different tools, services and formats.

The implementation of available online tools and combination of online/offline delivery has changed the way of teaching. In response to significant demand, many companies such as Zoom, Google, Skype etc. are bolstering capabilities to provide teachers and students with unlimited video conferencing time. Such services as Google Workspace (GSuite for Education) are widely used by Ukrainian universities. During the pandemic these tools enable educators to interact with students more efficiently and effectively via video conferences, chat groups, document sharing and make it easier to communicate with a teacher with the help of online platforms. In order to use these platforms with maximum effectivity Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute teachers are taking professional development training on the development and creation of distance learning courses on the basis of the Institute of Postgraduate Education. All distance learning materials and courses created by teachers are free of charge for Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute students. The study conducted at Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute demonstrated students' positive attitude to transformations introduced in the learning process after the lockdown restrictions and their willingness to stick to online learning tools in post-pandemic time after they come back to classroom (Melnychenko, Zheliaskova, 2021).

Different language aspects in ESL teaching. One of the most challenging tasks in ESL teaching is pronunciation. Synchronous process of phonetics learning usually involves such three main stages as showing learners what they need to do to produce the sound, drilling the sounds and giving feedback throughout the learning process. Asynchronous work involves using online tools, videos with instructional sessions, audio tracks containing examples of certain sounds etc. Zoom's polls, Google Classroom, Classtime etc. can be used for assessing students' pronunciation after they playback sounds or phrases and

choose what they hear from the list of options and repeat it themselves (Sokyrska, Buha, 2021). Also, there are many useful applications which facilitate teaching pronunciation providing clear explanation and demonstrating the right position of their tongue, lips etc. that allows to pronounce certain sounds.

Some English learning platforms (My English Lab) provide exercises where students are offered to listen to sentences which contain grammar and vocabulary taught during the lesson, pronounce and record them. The result is graded by the teacher and the feedback is left on the website and is sent to student's account. It is worth mentioning that with the development of online learning tools the interaction between students and teaching staff has improved.

In order to teach speaking skills distantly, the teacher has to a platform to deliver online classes. Many teachers prefer Zoom, Google meet or Skype which facilitate interaction with a group providing a built-in interactive whiteboard (Zoom), chat, breakout rooms, screen and video and screen sharing function etc.

Mastering speaking skills online can be a challenging task due to technical problems, unreliable internet connection, silent students in videoconference unwilling to speak etc. While working synchronously, these problems can be solved by engaging learners in creative tasks, involving them in polls, making then react to questions in the chat box, organizing pair work or splitting students into groups. Using breakout rooms gives students time and possibility to discuss new topics, debate, prepare for a presentation, negotiate a question or roleplay a situation.

Another important language aspect which should be trained for better understanding of the dialogue and monologue speech is listening. To organize activities aimed at improving listening skills various online tools can be used. To prepare learners for listening activities a teacher pre-teaches new vocabulary, sets the scene, gives the context, introduces new characters. After students are prepared for the task, a teacher can playback the recording once or several times depending on the level of the group. After the activity students can be organized into groups in breakout rooms or discuss key points of the recording together.

Nowadays teachers have access to a big variety of free authentic materials to develop students' listening skills. One of the sources providing online lectures for specific disciplines, interviews with native speakers, educational etc. videos is YouTube. These materials can be supplemented with pre- and post-listening activities tailored to students' needs. The usage of online tools helps teachers to adapt to learners' interests and needs, find resources and create tasks, activities and projects.

The recourses reviewed in the article supplement each other, and their combination is effective. But in order to achieve the goal and make the lesson effective a teacher has to combine multiple resources on various platforms, use different websites or applications which can be inconvenient and time consuming. Hence, creating a service which would be able to provide the opportunities for combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning would be groundbreaking for further development and enhancing of the potential of teaching English online.

Conclusions. In response to sudden changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic universities had to adapt quickly its technological and administrative systems for implementing online learning to provide free access to distance learning courses, create resources for asynchronous work and shift to inline instruction. While ensuring reliable connectivity is still a significant issue for many, it is worth mentioning that huge amount of resources aimed to facilitate interaction between, educators and students have ebbn developed and advanced, huge amount of activities and materials supplementing course materials was created by teachers during the quarantine restrictions.

The pandemic demonstrated that distance learning process is likely to have a lasting effect on lesson design. Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute have taken advantage of online education opportunities as it gave the stimulus to create effective distance learning environment "Sikorsky" Distance Learning Platform which provides students with free access to Moodle and Google Workspace distance learning courses that prove synchronous and asynchronous learning can go hand by hand.

Despite the difficulties the educators faced during the quarantine due to unplanned and rapid move to online work, many people believe that distance learning is prone to sustained growth which will lead to a new hybrid model of education.

Paths for great opportunities which online education gives have been built and it gives a clear route for future adopters of distance learning.

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