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Использование Skype-технологий для развития навыков аудирования и говорения при обучении гидов-переводчиков английскому языку

Введение. Актуальность исследования обусловлена необходимостью формирования и развития навыков аудирования и говорения, которые имеют решающее значение для гидов-переводчиков, использующих английский язык в работе с иностранными туристами и требуют постоянного совершенствования. Именно дистанционный формат обучения позволяет повысить свой профессиональный языковой уровень. Цель исследования заключается в разработке модели дистанционного обучения гидов-переводчиков английскому языку с применением Skype-технологий.

Методология. Ведущими методами явились метод выявления потребностей в обучении (анкетирование и собеседование) и педагогический эксперимент. Анкетирование, собеседование и тестирование позволили отобрать участников эксперимента, продемонстрировавших высокую мотивацию учиться в режиме онлайн и подтвердивших уровень владения английским языком на уровне B1-B2. В эксперименте, который проходил на базе Московской школы туризма и гостиничного бизнеса «Турцентр», приняли участие две группы по 14 человек. Используя личностно-ориентированный подход, был разработан рассчитанный на двенадцать недель онлайн курс английского языка с учетом основной программы профессиональной подготовки.

Результаты. Результаты итогового тестирования и собеседования показали, что данная методика с применением Skype-технологий эффективна и способствует дальнейшему формированию и развитию навыков говорения и аудирования. Количество студентов, испытывающих трудности, связанные с демонстрацией этих навыков, снизилось с 55% до 22% и 60% до 30% соответственно. Апробация разработанной модели позволила выявить достоинства и недостатки дистанционной формы обучения в целом и Skype-технологий, в частности.

Выводы. Исследование показало высокую эффективность Skype-технологий при обучении английскому языку для специальных целей в рамках дополнительного образовательного курса. Разработанная методика может быть использована в процессе практико-ориентированного обучения, направленного на формировании профессиональных компетенций будущих специалистов.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное образование, дистанционные технологии образовательного процесса, Skype-технологии, личностно-ориентированный подход, английский для специальных целей, английский для гидов-переводчиков, навыки аудирования и говорения

Ссылка для цитирования:

Пушкина А. В., Кривошлыкова Л. В., Ларина Е. В. Использование Skype-технологий для развития навыков аудирования и говорения при обучении гидов-переводчиков английскому языку // Перспективы науки и образования. 2021. № 2 (50). С. 447-458. doi: 10.32744/pse.2021.2.31

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Skype technologies in developing listening and speaking skills when teaching English to tour guides

Introduction. The relevance of the study is due to the need for the formation and development of listening and speaking skills, which are crucial for guides-translators who use English in work with foreign tourists and require constant improvement. It is the distance learning format that allows you to improve your professional language level. The purpose of the study is to develop a model for on-line teaching guides the English language employing Skype technologies.

Methodology. The key research methods were the method of a needs analysis (questionnaires and interviews) and a pedagogical experiment. Questionnaires, interviews and testing allowed selecting the participants of the experiment who demonstrated high motivation to study online and confirmed their B1-B2 level of English. The experiment, which took place on the basis of the Moscow School of Tourism and Hospitality "Tour Center", involved two groups of 14 people each. Using a learner-centered approach we created a twelve-week Skype-based English course, which correlated with the professional training syllabus of the participants of the experiment.

Results. The results of the final testing and interview showed that this technique with the use of Skype technologies is effective and contributes to the further formation and development of speaking and listening skills. The number of students experiencing difficulty demonstrating these skills decreased from 55% to 22% and 60% to 30%, respectively. In addition, the approbation of the developed model revealed the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in general and Skype technologies in particular.

Conclusion. The study showed the high efficiency of Skype-technologies in teaching English for special purposes as part of an additional educational course. The developed methodology can be used in the process of practice-oriented training aimed at forming the professional competencies of future specialists.

Keywords: on-line education, learner-centered approach, distance education techniques, Skype technologies, English for specific purposes, English for tour guides, listening and speaking skills

For Reference:

Pushkina, A. V., Krivoslykova, L. V., Larina, E. V. Skype technologies in developing listening and speaking skills when teaching English to tour guides. *Perspektivy nauki i obrazovaniya – Perspectives of Science and Education*, 50 (2), 447-458. doi: 10.32744/pse.2021.2.31

Introduction

Recent years have seen the significance of the issue of the use of modern technologies in teaching foreign languages (FL). These are not only new information technologies, but also new forms and methods of teaching, a new approach to the learning process. The main purpose of teaching FL is the development of communicative skills of students. Advanced pedagogical technologies, such as collaborative learning, project methodology, the use of new technological tools, Internet resources, help to implement a personality-oriented approach to learning, provide individualization and differentiation of learning, taking into account the abilities and needs of each student.

One of the important factors when choosing a methodology is the continuity of education. In this respect, the so called Lifelong Learning is viewed as a long process that continues throughout life. This conceptual framework fits the educational needs of all people, regardless of age, education, occupation and financial situation. The optimal way to ensure the continuity of secondary vocational education and the formation of foreign language communicative competence is to introduce modern methods of teaching foreign languages, innovative technologies in education into the established educational process.

Due to the fact that Russia is being integrated into the international economic and cultural spheres, the need for mastering foreign language arises in many areas of professional activity. One of these spheres is provision of tourism products for foreign tourists. In this paper, we consider tour guides (TGs) as the target audience for teaching them FL taking into account their professional needs.

The study is relevant owing to the rapid development of the use of contemporary information and communication technologies (ICT), especially today when teaching any subject, not only foreign languages, during the Covid-19 pandemic is a global challenge. Moreover, to date, there is no developed training system for foreign language guides but a training system for guide-interpreters. And this very lack of TGs-oriented language training programs encouraged us to create a new model of on-line teaching English to guides aimed at developing specific listening and speaking skills.

Literature review

The profession of a guide suggests constant communication with people, therefore it is important for a specialist to have good diction and competent speech, benevolence, emotional stability. The guide needs to keep in mind various historical facts, descriptions of events. This requires such qualities as creative thinking, the ability to analyze and generalize their knowledge. And if a guide works with foreign guests, then he needs to be able to think and analyze in a foreign language, and here memorizing excursion material is not enough.

Many recent studies have focused on TGs' professional and language training. S.H. Shatnawi, B.M. Al Najdawi, M.S. Kassawneh, I. Al-makhadmeh state that "the importance of tour guiding is the nature of the relationship between tour guides and tourists" [13, p.2]. Moreover, it is required to properly know history, archeology and culture of their country as well as customs and traditions of those they work with [13].

Experts believe it is crucial for TGs to master such skills as "intercultural interpretation and communication, the ability to contextualize information" as they act as mediators

“between the local community and visitors” [12, p.38]. A.L. Saraiva and F.O. Anjos call TGs “ambassadors for their culture” because they are “engaged in two-way communication” and in this respect, foreign language skills and knowledge of “communication techniques” are required to provide “effective intercultural communication” [12, p. 41].

A tour guide is a professionally trained person who offers not only sightseeing advice, organizes and leads excursions but also is involved in problem solving, translating and interpreting. “Language and first aid skills are useful, as is a driving license” [16].

Inbound tourism in Russia is developing rapidly, and therefore in Russia there is a need to train foreign language guides. As English is a language of international communication, the demand for guides with proper knowledge of English is the highest. In this respect, S.A. Gani highlights “it has become increasingly necessary for employees working in tourism” to improve their communication skills in order to “fulfill the needs of the tourists” [5].

It should be noted it is exactly the tour guides who need specific vocabulary for conducting excursions on a certain topic and the ability to give appropriate and informative answers to tourists’ questions, as TGs “play a very significant role in the promotion of countries” [11, p.213].

Recently, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on current innovative technologies in education. They are considered to be, first of all, information and communication technologies (ICT), associated with the use of computer-based teaching and learning. These technologies are successfully applied not only in teaching General English but also in teaching English for specific purposes (ESP). Obviously, teaching English for specific purposes implies the learner-centered approach as the very idea of ESP is supposed to meet students’ professional needs.

M. Abdelmalak and J. Trespalacios point out that “the learner-centered pedagogy removes students from their subordinate role” in the educational process [1, p. 326]. Moreover, in the framework of the learner-centered approach students are involved “in making some decisions about all components in the learning process” [1, p. 325].

There is no doubt that there is a great variety of educational Internet technologies but distance learning proves to be the most timely, relevant and frequently used. “With the start of the usage of distance education system, the education system became more effective due to the reduction in costs and required time” [11, p. 213]. Distance education meets today’s global challenges when lectures, seminars and workshops are conducted online without students being present in a classroom. However, R. Fojtík underlines that distance education “requires a lot of work both technically and methodically and didactically” and advises educators not to try to apply their experience from the day-to-day lessons” to on-line format of teaching [4]. That’s why to get the most of on-line education computer literacy is a must for educators. As M. Fisher considers “as we evolve into the information age”, it is significantly becoming very critical that educators “know how to access and apply technology” during the lesson [3].

Existing Internet resources attract students with their novelty, comfortable learning environment they provide.

Distance education techniques would also enable recording of training environment and would allow the documents, audio-visual files to be saved and archived. It would then become possible to revise the information which is thought to be perfect and complete [11, p.214].

There is a number of programmes which can be employed in distance education. They are Skype, OpenTok, ooVoo, Google+Hangouts, GoToMeeting, WebEx, Microsoft Windows Vista Meeting Space, Microsoft Office Live Meeting 2007. All these programmes have their

own advantages and disadvantages but the most widespread and popular is Skype. "Skype is that online tool which makes the EFL learners able to exchange their views and ideas with others without any fee or resistance" [7]. This program is free and available to everyone, does not require special skills or devices to use it. "It has become the main Microsoft Messaging service. Nowadays, Skype is the leader for video communication and for online voice calls" [2]. All the students need is a personal computer (stationary or laptop), headphones, microphone, Internet access, Skype program. Moreover, smartphones allow minimizing a number of devices mentioned above.

Skype in particular provides teachers with a suitable platform to enhance students' language abilities and it is ideal for role-playing based learning activities. Role playing has been proved to be an effective English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching tool [18]. Students can work on projects, explore different cultures from all over the globe. By this feature, students build compassion, share knowledge, have fun and empathy for one another [2].

Methodology

The study was aimed at on-line developing guides' listening and speaking skills employing ICT, namely, Skype technology. The experiment was conducted at the tourism and hospitality school "Tour Center" in Moscow. To better understand the specifics of the courses for tour guides, we considered the training program of the school, which includes the following disciplines: tourism and hospitality studies, Cultural and of Religious aspects of Russian History, Architecture of Moscow, Culture of speech and Etiquette, Arranging and Conducting excursions course (for a bus tour around Moscow and the Moscow region). There is no English classes in the curriculum because they get their qualification as a tour guide working with Russian speaking audience.

To select participants for the sample we asked 82 students attending the school to fill in the questionnaire to identify their willingness to enter extracurricular online English classes (see Table 1).

Table 1

Questionnaire I

<i>Are you interested in giving excursions to foreigners in English?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>Are you willing to enter extracurricular online English classes?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i> <i>If yes, highlight your preference: off-line/online via Skype</i>
<i>How many hours per week are you willing to study English?</i>	<i>2-3</i> <i>4-5</i> <i>More than 5</i>
<i>Underline what is true for you:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I need to improve my grammar.</i> - <i>I need to improve my speaking skills.</i> - <i>I need to expand my professional vocabulary.</i> - <i>I need to expand general vocabulary.</i> - <i>I don't understand anything when they speak to me in English.</i> - <i>I understand when someone speaks to me in English, but I would like to improve my listening skills.</i>

Having collected the data, we found out that the majority of the future guides attending the school are interested in extra English classes since they see their career in the field of international tourism. Regarding distance learning, the opinions divided. Some students

preferred the traditional form, off-line classes, which is quite reasonable: face-to-face classes are more effective due to the teacher's ability to pay attention to every question and student's knowledge gaps. However, the overwhelming majority chose distance learning, explaining their choice by the fact that studying on-line, they do not have to spend time on the way to school and back, and they can safely combine study with their job. The results of the survey are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Figures 1 and 2 present the students' preferences.

Figure 1 The number of students who are willing to enter extracurricular English classes

Figure 2 The preferences of students in choosing on-line/off-line learning

Next needs analysis was conducted as it has a significant role for us “to make a number of planning decisions, capitalize on students’ strength and motivation in ESP course” and “to decide the strategies and learning activities” [10]. So we studied the reasons motivating students to have extra English classes to understand what to focus on when developing curriculum and exercises. The survey results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Reasons to have extra English classes

The diagram shows that most students would like to improve their speaking and listening skills. This definitely met our expectations and goals.

We interviewed those desired to join our experimental group and identified their level of English by means of an independent educational Cambridge platform [15] as our course was designed to teach B1/B2-level student. As only 28 students confirmed the appropriate level of the language, two groups were formed before the experiment. However, despite the test passed, the level of English confirmed and the interview conducted, the students had difficulties in performing the following skills: grammar skills – 35%, speaking skills – 55%, listening skills –60%.

The model of distance teaching English to guides applying Skype technologies

When thinking over our extra curriculum course, we focused on the development of listening and speaking skills, that is, the ability to understand the questions of tourists and answer them appropriately. Educators stress that the main goal of any ESP course is “to enable learners to function adequately in a target situation” and the learners’ needs are the focus of teachers’ methodological strategies [10].

Taking into account the needs analysis results, we created a teaching model on which the training course for foreign language guides was based. The course was designed for 12 weeks, provided that the guide course at the school continued during 16 weeks and the students had to prepare for from their qualification exams. To supply the students with teaching/learning materials we deliberately came down in favour of the well-known, thoroughly elaborated from methodical point of view learning kits such as Language Leader, New English File, English for International Tourism since these textbooks contain texts and exercises aimed at developing listening and speaking skills, including the topics that are applicable to teach tour guides.

Based on the syllabus of the school of guides, we compiled topic-based units for discussion and grammar-focused activities (see Table 2) and incorporated the model into the existing training program for tour guides in the tourism and hospitality school "Tour Center" in Moscow.

Table 2

The contents of the course

Weeks	Topics
Week 1	Main terms and definitions
Week 2	Why people travel: purposes. Giving directions. Differences between journey, trip, voyage, travelling
Week 3	Present Simple. There is/are: Sights/places. Different aspects of giving a tour (starting with the weather)
Week 4	At a picture gallery. Present Continuous
Week 5	Describe nature. Repeat Comparative and Superlative adjectives
Week 6	Food. Dealing with complaints. Some, any, much, many, a lot of

Week 7	Giving a short talk. History. Past Simple. Passive Voice
Week 8	Famous people. Past Simple/Past Continuous
Week 9	City tours/ virtual city tours
Week 10	Health and safety advice. Crime. Should/must
Week 11	Resorts and Destinations. Will/going to. Shopping/souvenirs
Week 12	Winter activities

To test our model, we selected (as it was mentioned above) two groups of 14 people each. To conduct our on-line classes we chose Skype as a very popular videoconferencing tool and easy to use. The conferences were held once a week and lasted for 4 academic hours with a fifteen-minute break. After the conference the students were given a set of tasks for individual and pair work in the form of reading, memorizing and practicing active vocabulary, preparing and practicing tourist-guide dialogues, etc.

It should be noted that before the course we sent the students the links to the above-mentioned learning kits. Those who had problems to follow the links got material scans via Chat prior or during the lesson.

The structure of each lesson was the following (see Table 3):

Table 3

Lesson structure

<i>Components of the teaching modal</i>	Activities
<i>I. Warming-up/pre-watching component</i>	• Answering questions/sharing opinions
<i>II. Audiovisual component</i>	• Watching video, further discussion
<i>III. Grammar component</i>	• Grammar revision • Listening comprehension
<i>IV. Speaking component</i>	• Speaking during video conferences • Pair-work/individual project

Here we present a plan of the lesson *At the picture gallery* (week 4) as an example.

I. Warming-up/pre-watching component.

Answer the following questions.

- What is the famous picture gallery in your city?
- Have you ever been to the National gallery in London? What is it famous for?
- What is the most famous picture in the world, if any?

II. Audiovisual component.

Watch the video *In the Frame: Rembrandt's Girl at a Window at Dulwich Picture Gallery* / Tatler UK [6].

- While watching the video make all necessary notes for further discussion.
- Watch it again focusing on the history of the picture and its description.
- Say why the girl is called *Mona Lisa of London*.

III. Grammar component.

1. Grammar revision. The Present Continuous tense.

2. Listening comprehension. In the framework of this lesson Present Continuous is in the focus of the Listening part. It is very important to draw the students' attention to the vocabulary and the structure of the description of the picture as they are supposed to make a similar speech of their own.

- Listen to a guide in an art gallery talking about At the Moulin Rouge.

- Answer the questions.

What was the Moulin Rouge famous for?

Who did Toulouse-Lautrec include in his paintings and posters?

Which person is Toulouse-Lautrec?

Why do some people think he liked painting the dancers? [9, p.8]

IV. Speaking component.

1. Speaking during the videoconference.

- Students are given a number of pictures of famous artists to choose one of them and describe it to an imaginary tourist using active vocabulary and speech patterns from the video watched and the text listened to.

2. Pair-work/individual project.

Students are supposed to role-play a tourist-guide dialogue at a picture gallery or to make an oral presentation of some picture gallery.

As for dialogues the students practice answering questions and responding to comments because well-trained TGs are not only to answer questions but to anticipate them.

It should be also underlined that if making an individual project appeared to be their homework, the students were expected to employ visual materials. The students proved to be very enthusiastic about such activities because they found them quite helpful and applicable for their future job.

Results

After the experiment the participants were asked to answer another questionnaire to find out their opinion about the Skype-based course they attended (see Table 4).

Table 4

Questionnaire II

<i>Are you satisfied with the course you attended on-line?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>Did it meet your expectations?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>Did you face any problems during the on-line course concerning the educational process?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i> <i>If yes, list them.</i>
<i>Did you face any problems during the on-line course concerning the technical aspect of the educational process?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i> <i>If yes, list them.</i>
<i>Will you recommend the online course to your friends?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i> <i>If no, why.</i>

The results of the questionnaire showed that all the students were satisfied with the course, which met all their expectations. It is understandable since, on the one hand, they chose the on-line format deliberately and, on the other hand, before the course they had been provided with all the information concerning it. During the period of study

the students faced no educational problems, they felt fully engaged in learning process. However, four respondents answered that they had had certain technical problems, which were solved after they updated the Skype version and fastened their Internet speed. Only one respondent though being satisfied with the course did not want to recommend the course to his friends because in general he tended towards the traditional off-line format of learning.

It is critical to point out that while performing the similar final testing procedure the students demonstrated progress with a certain decrease of the difficulties: grammar skills – 28%, speaking skills – 22%, listening skills - 30%.

In the course of testing this model, some advantages and disadvantages were identified, and some recommendations were formulated for the further implementation of this model in the teaching-learning process.

The implementation of our model on the base of Skype technology proved to be very resultative and efficient. It is worth noting that before the beginning of the training, the students had serious problems with listening and comprehension, grammar aspects and speaking. But due to properly worked-out activities their listening comprehension, speaking skills and grammar and speech patterns usage improved significantly. At the same time, Skype technology, on the one hand, helped to create student-friendly educational environment (comfortable domestic atmosphere, no need to commute from home to school, etc.) and, allowed sticking to classroom format learning, on the other hand. It resulted in the students' overcoming psychological barrier and demonstrating their improved language skills. Moreover, Skype technical characteristics enabled students to make the most of its functions: they demonstrated their Power Point presentations, shared videos, etc. They also highly estimated the use of the Chat which let them ask questions without interrupting the speaker who could follow the groupmates' remark and take them into account while performing his/her monologue.

Apart from the prevailing advantages of Skype technology applied while testing our model, some negative aspects should be mentioned. From a technical point of view, certain problems occurred if a student had an outdated operating system, an outdated version of Skype or poor Internet connection. As a result, Skype slowed down, did not play video, etc. Though some experts claim that while interacting via Skype a teacher is unable to control the students, and "the teacher does not see what the student writes and cannot correct the error in time" [8], we did not face the problem since our students were highly motivated; as for mistakes correction writing was not the target activity of our course but when necessary we used Chat to spell this or that word.

Summarizing all the pros and cons of testing our model, we came to the conclusion that teaching languages via Skype is very convenient but to minimize all possible negative aspects during the educational process we recommend that the students and the teacher check in advance that Skype and the appropriate operating system are available on their computer, provide themselves with a good Internet connection during the lesson, and check the sound and camera on their computer before the lesson. If something goes wrong a student is to get all the material or a recording of the lesson to catch up with the group. In case a teacher cannot deliver a lesson, it should be set on a later date. So we agree with L. Taillefer and R. Munoz-Luna that "the disadvantages related to Skype are minimal in comparison to the benefits" [14].

Conclusion

The study showed that in the process of teaching-learning foreign languages Skype technology presents exceptional opportunities to apply communicative approach to develop all type of language skills. During all twelve weeks the students demonstrated enthusiasm and creativity in terms of pair-work and oral presentations.

Our worked-out and tested model can be freely applied by educators to match any learning needs. The key point is that the teacher's competence to select proper materials and activities and to thoroughly organize teaching-learning process during Skype-based lesson keeps students encouraged and motivated.

The results of our experimental study and the very fact that the would-be guides we worked with were determined to learn English via Skype long before the pandemic. When in March 2020 the world faced the rise of Covid-19 pandemic and the following total lockdown, teachers and educators all over the globe realized "changes and adjustments would need to happen quickly" and students had to be provided "with a valuable education in the midst of this chaos" [17]. Our experience in implementing our Skype-based teaching methods helped us switch from off-line format within a least possible period of time and minimize our students' stress and fears today. The classes have been conducted without the detriment to educational process.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been supported by the RUDN University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

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