

DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Globalization process and development of information technologies all over the world have caused the necessity of searching for new approaches to professional training and education of young specialists. Nowadays, the new generations of young professionals have to be flexible and quickly adapt to changing technologies, as well as be able to improve their knowledge for the short period of time and constantly increase professional competence.

The educational system that meets such requirements should be based on innovative technologies to provide the appropriate mobility level of a specialist in gaining important skills and knowledge.

It is clear that speaking English now is not a special skill, but the one that has become usual and necessary for building career, although there are still lots of people who start learning English in adult life. Such students usually work full-time and it is often hard for them to find time for classes during the weekdays, so having a chance of learning English distantly could become the real solution.

Distance education describes the idea of providing access to learning for those who are geographically distant. The roots of distance education are at least 160 years old. It started from the advertisement in a Swedish newspaper in 1833 touted the opportunity to study “Composition through the medium of the Post.” In 1840, England’s newly established penny post allowed Isaac Pitman to offer shorthand instruction via correspondence. Three years later, instruction was formalized with the founding of the Phonographic Correspondence Society, precursor of Sir Isaac Pitman’s Correspondence Colleges. Distance education, in the form of correspondence study, was established in Germany by Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt, who taught language in Berlin. Correspondence study crossed the Atlantic in 1873 when Anna Eliot Ticknor founded a Boston-based society to encourage study at home. The Society to Encourage Studies at Home attracted more

than 10,000 students in 24 years. Students of the classical curriculum (mostly women) corresponded monthly with teachers, who offered guided readings and frequent tests.

From 1883 to 1891, academic degrees were authorized by the state of New York through the Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts to students who completed the required summer institutes and correspondence courses. In 1886, H. S. Hermod, of Sweden, began teaching English by correspondence. In 1898 he founded Hermod's, which would become one of the world's largest and most influential distance-teaching organizations. Correspondence study continued to develop in Britain with the founding of a number of correspondence institutions, such as Skerry's College in Edinburgh in 1878 and University Correspondence College in London in 1887. At the same time, the university extension movement in the United States and England promoted the correspondence method. Among the pioneers in the field were Illinois Wesleyan in 1877 and the University Extension Department of the University of Chicago in 1892.

Distance education began to enrich the secondary school curriculum in the 1920s. Students in Benton Harbor, Michigan, were offered vocational courses in 1923, and six years later, the University of Nebraska began experimenting with correspondence courses in high schools. In France, the Ministry of Education set up a government correspondence college in response to the impending Second World War.

The original target groups of distance education efforts were adults with occupational, social, and family commitments. This remains the primary target group today. Distance education provided the opportunity to widen intellectual horizons, as well as the chance to improve and update professional knowledge. Further, it stressed individuality of learning and flexibility in both the time and place of study. Two philosophies of distance education became identifiable. The full liberalism of programs offered by Hermod's in Sweden emphasized the free pacing of progress through the program by the student. Other programs, such as those offered by the University of Chicago, offered a more rigid schedule of weekly lessons.

With development of new electronic technologies distance education continued its expansion. Internet brings education into every house and these days you can get knowledge even not leaving your room. Using the distance learning technology and the Internet in particular for teaching English has become a prospective approach to learn and practice new skills. With the help of Internet students are able to improve their skills of communication, reading and understanding of spoken English, they also learn how to supply and find information, express their feelings and emotions as well as exchange opinions. During a usual class with the only teacher it is hardly ever possible to have a real conversation which has got a deep sense and meaning, and information technologies, the Internet and distance learning can create such English-speaking environment with the help of different chats, e-mails, social networks and messengers. Students can take part in cross-cultural communication all over the world, understand nuances of the language and practice their skills talking to native speakers and to those who also learn English but live in different countries.

Learning English paradigm contemplates communication as the basis of language learning, highlights the true purpose of using language, promotes language practicing instead of just studying grammar, develops interpersonal communication and focuses on the educational process and learning environment. Distance learning can play an important role in any of these categories. Internet encourages communication and offers opportunities that are impossible in classroom teaching. Moreover, the use of computer-mediated communication helps to transfer from the traditional approach to learning focused on teacher to the student-centered approach. Special attention should be paid to the course design and planning. Teachers can design courses that encourage students to interact and discuss the meaning of the course, its characteristics and features. Distance language courses can provide real alternatives for students who are geographically isolated or need a flexible learning environment.

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