

Innovative Aspects of Teaching Foreign Students to Read in English during Distance Learning

Aspectos innovadores de enseñar a leer en inglés a estudiantes extranjeros durante el aprendizaje a distancia

Natalia V. Semian* 

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7894-6355>

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*Correspondencia

Email: n.semian5676@kpi.com.de

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Summary

This study examines the issues of teaching foreign students to read in English in the period of distance learning. The relevance of the problem under study is driven by the need for implementation of non-standard systems of teaching students the reading techniques in response to the quarantine isolation, due to the inability to undergo training according to the standard scheme. The purpose of the paper is to investigate and determine the main directions to consider the problem at hand, with an indication of its specific innovative solutions. A combination of analytical and logical research methods with a detailed analysis of available studies in the chosen field was chosen as the leading approach to the investigation of this question. The main results of this paper are: a statement of the availability of unlimited opportunities in this field, with the development of the Internet-based teaching technologies, and the recognition of the fact that the level of technical equipment of Ukrainian universities corresponds to that necessary for conducting successful classes with foreign students online in order to teach them to read in English. Prospects for further research in this area are determined by the urgent need for the development of distance learning in general and to teach foreign students to read in English, in particular, using innovative solutions that increase the overall efficiency of the teaching process.

Keywords: educational programme, innovative technologies, reading technique, learning material, interactivity.

Resumen

Este estudio examina los problemas de enseñar a los estudiantes extranjeros a leer en inglés en el período de aprendizaje a distancia. La relevancia del problema en estudio es impulsada por la necesidad de implementación de sistemas atípicos de enseñanza de las técnicas de lectura a los estudiantes en respuesta al aislamiento cuarentenario, debido a la imposibilidad de recibir capacitación según el esquema estándar. El propósito del trabajo es investigar y determinar las principales direcciones para considerar el problema en cuestión, con una indicación de sus soluciones innovadoras específicas. Se eligió una combinación de métodos de investigación analíticos y lógicos con un análisis detallado de los estudios disponibles en el campo elegido como el enfoque principal para la investigación de esta cuestión. Los principales resultados de este trabajo son: una declaración de la disponibilidad de oportunidades ilimitadas en este campo, con el desarrollo de las tecnologías de enseñanza basadas en Internet, y el reconocimiento del hecho de que el nivel de equipamiento técnico de las universidades ucranianas corresponde al necesario para realizar clases exitosas con estudiantes extranjeros en línea para enseñarles a leer en inglés. Las perspectivas de nuevas investigaciones en esta área vienen determinadas por la urgente necesidad de desarrollar la educación a distancia en general y de enseñar a los estudiantes extranjeros a leer en inglés, en particular, utilizando soluciones innovadoras que aumenten la eficiencia general del proceso de enseñanza.

Palabras clave: programa educativo, tecnologías innovadoras, técnica de lectura, material de aprendizaje, interactividad.

Introduction

Technologies for teaching foreign languages change simultaneously with the way of life and the social development. In the 20th century, there was a sharp increase in the volume of information flow, which is obligatory for students to assimilate, and the amount of this information is only growing. In this regard, the importance of innovative teaching methods increases, which makes possible to speed up the learning process and adapt it as much as possible to modern conditions. Modern technologies of distance education are developing in parallel with the improvement of technical means, as well as information carriers. In the third millennium, distance learning using the Internet is gaining popularity, which brings special attention of researchers to various aspects of the theory and practice of distance education (Yamskikh, 2004). Numerous studies are being conducted to prove the effectiveness of online learning and its particular importance in the changed socio-economic conditions. This fact is confirmed by the growth in the number of students studying online in Ukraine and other countries. In this context, it would be appropriate to turn our attention to the concept of distance learning. The research literature contains the following: “Distance learning is a specially organised, purposeful process involving the possibility of interaction between a teacher and a student, using information and communication technologies. Refers to a pedagogical system, with such constituent elements as the goal of learning, methods, means, form and content, the teacher and the learner” (Andreev & Soldatkin, 2013). In modern conditions, distance learning should be considered as an alternative form of conducting the learning process, which provides an individual trajectory of education, based on the use of a wide range of both technical innovations and the latest information technologies. All this is used for high-quality presentation of the material, its learning by students and ensuring their communication with the teacher (Vinichenko et al., 2018).

The technology of online learning to teach English is based on computers and telecommunication. At the same time, the role of human factor remains fundamental. According to a number of researchers discussing the issues of distance learning, “it is assumed that there is a variant of interaction of subjects of the educational process, in which there is a free exchange of information in both directions, the cognitive personal potentials of the teacher and the student, and also there is a change in the personal characteristics of perception of reality, worldview, problem solving approach” (Rastimeshina & Lunkina, 2015). The context of the future professional activity of the student must be taken into account. At the same time, the importance of innovative solutions in teaching foreign students to read in English in the context of distance education is increasing. In this regard, it becomes obvious that students need to develop skills of quick understanding of the text. The speed of the student’s orientation in the process of increasing the volume of assimilated information, as well as the skills of independent search for knowledge and its mastery, depend on how quickly this skill is formed. The basis for the development of this skill is active creative work with the information presented in the texts. This is despite the fact that the meaning of the same text can be understood in different ways by different students. The meaning of the text follows from its interpretation by students in the process of its further processing, regardless of the source material (Romanenko, 2019; Khalimon et al., 2019).

Listening is one of the basic skills in educational communication. When teaching reading remotely, this skill is of little importance. The main attention is paid to the skills of independent work with the information received and finding the key aspects to which the special attention should be paid. At the same time, the skills of the teacher to give the most understandable tasks, which do not imply an ambiguous interpretation, is of particular importance. In this aspect, innovative technologies should contribute to the creation of the highest quality conditions for independent teaching of reading (Artamonova et al., 2012; Skydan, 2009). A number of Ukrainian universities have taken steps to resolve this problem. In

particular, at the Karazin Kharkiv National University there is an institute of extramural training, where teaching is conducted exclusively online. Special technologies of distance learning are used, which have been tested in practice and have shown good results. There are similar developments in other Ukrainian universities. In general, the issues of innovation in distance teaching are closely related to various aspects of teaching English in general and teaching it to foreign students in particular (Kormos & Nijakowska, 2017). Also, this includes the issues of distance education in Ukrainian universities and the organisation of the educational process. Ukrainian teaching staff have the innovative technologies that are not available in some universities abroad, such as systems for automated accounting of read characters and systems for checking the quality of reading. Such innovations allow foreign students to successfully learn to read in English practically without the participation of a teacher, if the student expresses such desire. Moreover, foreign students learning to read in English at Ukrainian universities have the opportunity to independently choose the teaching system: with or without the participation of teachers.

Literature Review

Innovative teaching technologies play a special role in this regard, since they contribute to the improvement of the quality of the teaching process and the achievement of higher results by the students. The issues of innovation in teaching foreign students to read in English are widely discussed in scientific literature. Researchers have expressed different opinions on the effectiveness of distance education when teaching to read a foreign language, English in particular, with special attention paid to the implementation and development of innovations in this area. In particular Yu.M. Romanenko (2019), investigating various aspects of innovations in modern higher education, notes that: “The accelerating pace of life every year requires new skills. The knowledge and approaches to their acquisition, which had an effect yesterday, are outdated today and require serious improvement”. For his part, M. Adler (2013) provides specific innovative approaches in relation to teaching reading techniques for a foreign language. According to his recommendations, there are three actual ways of reading: analytical, structural, in which there is a movement of the reader from the whole text to its part; interpretive, synthetic – the movement of the reader goes in the opposite direction; evaluative, critical – the reader independently makes a decision for himself whether to agree with the author’s opinion or not. According to the researcher, each method needs to be mastered in order to understand the meaning and evaluate the content of any text, when reading it in a foreign language (English in particular) (Adler, 2013).

Foreign authors also note the need to use additional resources in distance learning. In particular, N. Ruiying, et al. (2018) found in their research: “Distance learning in the context of learning reading in English can provide students with a variety of potential learning opportunities, the usefulness of which depends on the ability of students to find and use these resources”. Foreign researchers also addressed the issues of distance learning in the context of the lack of clear contact between student and teacher. Thus, N.P. Morris et al. (2019) note: “Universities around the world are increasingly offering students a blended learning approach to support education based on a combination of traditional learning and distance learning, using a wide range of educational technologies, tools and systems. Research has shown that this approach to learning offers at least equivalent learning outcomes for students and increases flexibility, inclusiveness, engagement and motivation”. S. Mumford and K. Dikilitaş (2020), examining the development of teacher reflection in distance learning, point out “the difficulty of teaching reading in the absence of the teacher” and “the need to prepare the teacher to work online”. Thus, the need to find and implement innovative approaches to teaching students reading techniques online is emphasised by the researchers quite often.

Assessing the severity of the problems of learning foreign languages in Ukraine, Yu.Yu. Digtyar (2019) notes that: “One of the essential problems of group teaching is the inability of some students to master the teaching materials in the presence of others. The reasons can be both personal and psychological qualities, such students require considerable effort to perceive the material and its digestion” (Digtyar, 2019; Reiterer et al., 2020). Distance learning in this case can be a solution to the problem. The researcher points out about this further “the solution to the situation lies in the introduction of an individual approach to the student, which can best be implemented with the introduction of distance learning” (Digtyar, 2019). In addition, the researcher notices the fundamental factors in conducting distance learning to read in English. In his opinion, “the following aspects should be highlighted: the study of new vocabulary is carried out using electronic textbooks and exercises attached to them; the study of grammar should be carried out with the provision of students with access to textbooks, dictionaries, reference books, the use of network technologies is encouraged; the study of phonetics is carried out in stages approved by the teacher. All learning processes are coordinated by the teacher” (Digtyar, 2019). Thus, innovation in teaching foreign students to read in English is an absolute must and the work of numerous researchers only confirms this.

Materials and methods

The study aims to investigate the innovative aspects of teaching foreign students to read in English under conditions of distance learning. The analysis of this issue is carried out as part of teaching foreign students in Ukraine and a comparison with other countries is performed. The research methodology is based on a combination of analytical and logical methods of studying the issue under consideration. Based on an in-depth analysis of scientific developments in the field of distance learning, the main problems that affect the learning effectiveness in general and distance learning of foreign students to read in English in particular are identified. The analysis of studies in the framework of the issue under consideration is carried out, which significantly expands the range of scientific developments of the topic and complements the existing ideas. At the same time, a significant amount of data was taken from foreign sources: scientific papers, Internet publications, which allows a comparative analysis of the developments of Ukrainian and foreign researchers and form an objective comparison of the state of affairs in the field of distance learning in Ukraine and other countries. To facilitate the perception of information and create the most objective, holistic picture of the research being carried out, all information taken from foreign sources has been translated into English. Based on the collected information and its analytical processing, a logical analysis is carried out, which involves the isolation of the main aspects of the issue under consideration, indicating the degree of their importance in a particular consideration (Kostruba, 2019; Skydan et al., 2019).

The main directions of innovative activities in the aspect of remotely teaching foreign students to read in English are determined, conclusions on this issue are drawn, based on the research conducted within the framework of the chosen methodology. In addition, specific methodological innovations in the field of distance learning in Ukrainian educational institutions are indicated and the necessary parallels with world experience are drawn. At the moment, distance learning is becoming essential due to the coronavirus pandemic and the limitation on the work of many educational institutions, with their transition to distance learning mode. This fact determines the importance and significance of the study, determines its significance for subsequent scientific developments. The chosen methodology of the study meets the set tasks as much as possible in the context of the importance and significance of the subject of research. Subsequently, it can be applied in further research on a similar subject and give the necessary results. The issues of innovative developments in distance teaching of foreign students to read in English require additional research due to the constantly expanding scientific and technical base of modern universities and the opening possibilities of using the

latest technological developments in the field of distance learning. Every year, distance learning is gaining more and more importance in the system of higher and secondary education, and this issue is receiving more and more attention from both students and the teaching staff. The choice of research methodology in this direction is of great importance for obtaining the necessary results, they are able to qualitatively solve the problem under consideration. In general, the materials and methods of this study fully meet the set task of collecting and analysing the necessary data.

Results and discussion

The study of the innovative aspects of teaching foreign students to read in English online has led to the following results. Innovations in the field of distance learning are of great importance due to the following circumstances: distance learning has significant prospects under conditions of the quarantine and forced restriction of the work of universities; students have the opportunity to independently choose the methods and form of training; distance learning is convenient for students burdened with work and family; distance learning is mobile and can be carried out from anywhere in the world. The personal computer provides virtually unlimited distance learning opportunities. Computer technology creates a multimedia learning environment in which all types of verbal and non-verbal visualisation are used, such as animation, sound, graphics. International students learning to read in English use many channels of perception in independent work. The innovative possibilities in this area are practically unlimited. Nevertheless, in relation to the Ukrainian system of higher education, several main innovative aspects of distance teaching of foreign students should be highlighted: the use of reading educational programmes with the possibility of giving voice commands; selection of the optimal communication mode for teachers and students in the learning process; introduction of a system for assessing the individual characteristics of the student; steady, constant feedback from the teacher to the student; choice by students of their own strategy for achieving the desired qualification level and information support means (Kostruba, 2018).

The latter aspect is becoming most relevant, due to significant differences in the level of initial training of foreign students undergoing distance learning at Ukrainian higher institutions. In this regard, a separate problem is the correct organisation of training. In the system of Ukrainian higher education in the context of distance learning for foreign students, the main attention is paid to the following aspects: reciting by students what they read; listening; reading separate thematic paragraphs. The control of the level of students' reading perception by teachers suggests the presence of various options. Among them: testing, survey, retelling. At the same time, it should be noted that in Ukrainian universities there is a principle of taking into account the individual characteristics of foreign students, which manifests itself in the fact that interaction with the teacher is carried out in a consultation mode, as the student has questions (Powell & Bodur, 2019). In addition, students have at their disposal a variety of electronic reference books, links to interactive manuals that greatly facilitate the tasks of learning to read. Students have a choice: to practice the technique of reading in English with a teacher or to turn to electronic systems for monitoring the reading quality. Thus, there is an adaptation of the computer systems at the disposal of Ukrainian universities to the needs of foreign students studying to read in English (Walsh et al., 2020). Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of the degree of application of some technical innovations in the field of distance learning for foreign students at universities in Ukraine, Belgium and Germany.

Table 1. The use of certain technical innovations in distance learning of foreign students to read in English

Country	Remote contact with the teacher	Electronic directories	Character count tools	Systems for rating the reading quality
Ukraine	used	used	used	used
Belgium	used	used (not everywhere)	used	used
Germany	used	used	used	not used

A comparative analysis allows us to conclude that there is a significant level of technical equipment of Ukrainian universities that provide distance education to foreign students. The difficulty of teaching foreign students to read is the fact that not all of them are fluent in Russian, which makes it difficult to contact the teacher in some cases. To solve this problem, teachers in universities use an online audio translator. In general, distance learning of foreign students using Internet communications has been practiced in Ukrainian higher institutions for more than a year, and under conditions of quarantine restrictions is becoming increasingly important. For the organisation of the educational process in the conditions of the university, it is necessary to: establish the material and technical support (computers, Internet connection); to provide teachers and students with teaching materials; to prepare teachers and students; to plan the educational process (Golub et al., 2019; Golub et al., 2020).

The use of technical innovations can significantly speed up the process. In Ukrainian universities, when teaching reading in English, the YouTube service is actively used remotely, where videos are uploaded with samples of the correct reading and pronunciation of various texts. Distance learning technologies are improving every year, their efficiency is increasing. This determines the annual growth in the number of foreign students studying to read in English remotely in Ukraine. The chart below (Figure 1) shows the number of students who completed similar training during 2019 in Ukraine, Belgium and Germany.

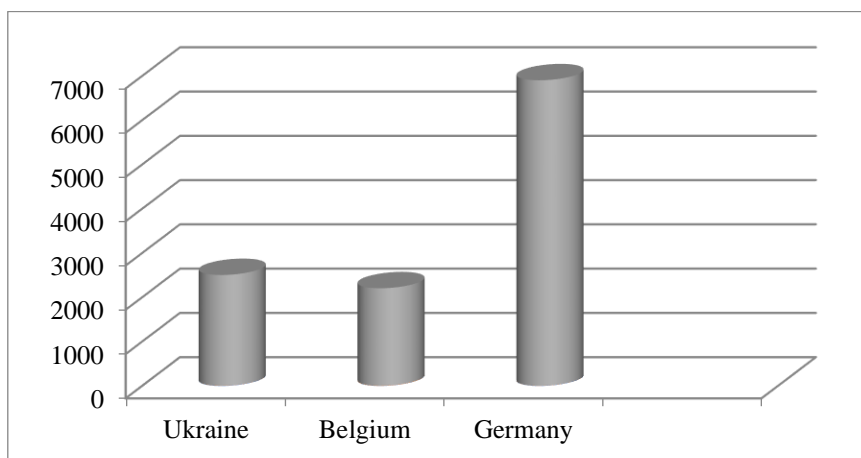


Figure 1. The total number of students who received distance education courses in reading in English at universities of Ukraine, Belgium and Germany in 2019

In this context, an example of teaching foreign students to read in English at the Kyiv National Linguistic University is of interest. In 2020, the teachers of the English language department of the specified university developed and successfully conducted a series of training webinars for foreign students, in which the Microsoft Teams online platform was used, which in itself is an innovative solution. Previously, this platform was used at this university only for

teaching classes. It is convenient in that it includes all the resources necessary for online group classes: general chat, a webinar room for teachers, technical capabilities for broadcasting training slides, as well as all the possibilities of interactive communication. Classes were conducted online, with a slide show, including text fragments and transcription. Foreign students were asked to read the text after the teacher and fix the pronunciation. Constant feedback of the teacher to the students was provided throughout the webinar lesson. This innovation has shown excellent results, expressed in the better quality of the assimilation of the educational material by the students, due to its visual presentation, as well as in the increase in the total number of students on the specified online platform. The quantitative, comparative results of the growth in the number of foreign students who remotely studied reading in English at the Kyiv National Linguistic University over the past three years are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The total number of foreign students who studied reading in English remotely at the Kyiv National Linguistic University over the past three years

	2018	2019	2020
Total number of students received distance education	155	212	567

Table 2 clearly shows the increase in the number of foreign students of the specified university who have learned the technique of reading in English, due to the introduction of an innovative approach associated with conducting webinars on the Microsoft Teams online platform. It should be noted that data for the current year are given only for the first half of it. In this regard, it should be noted that the introduction of the practice of webinars to teach foreign students to read in English in Ukraine is not uncommon. Such techniques have been successfully tested and implemented in a number of Ukrainian universities, such as Karazin Kharkiv National State University, Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, Uzhgorod National University, as well as a number of other higher educational institutions. The following platforms are used as effective platforms for organising online learning: Zoom; GetCourse; Teachbase; WebTutor and several others. The use of online learning platforms in combination with cloud storage services, a variety of plugins for expanding functionality, student competency assessment services and much more shows excellent results in terms of increasing the effectiveness of distance learning to read international students. The functionality of training platforms allows to place almost any training information on them, both textual and graphic, which makes the learning process visual. In addition, it is possible to conduct distance learning using this functionality from almost anywhere in the world. Among other advantages of innovations of this kind, it is worth noting: the possibility of conducting classes with an unlimited number of students, which is excluded in skype conferences; simplicity and availability of functionality for the teacher and students; the ability to convey to all listeners the peculiarities of the pronunciation of certain complex text fragments, which is extremely important when teaching the technique of reading in a foreign language.

The possibilities of online learning platforms are constantly expanding, which makes their use more and more attractive. In general, innovations in the field of distance education of foreign students are being successfully implemented in Ukraine and other countries. This is facilitated by an increase in the number of students studying English and the development of Internet technologies. In the future, it is expected to introduce fundamentally new innovations in this area, taking into account the increase in the number of students and the growth of requirements for the quality of teaching reading in English. The teaching staff of Ukrainian universities should pay special attention to the development of educational innovations. The issues of distance teaching of foreign students to read in English remains largely controversial. Researchers have expressed different opinions on the feasibility of innovations in this area and their practical usefulness. In particular, A.A. Andreev and V.I. Soldatkin (2013) argue that “e-learning” involves the active participation of all members of the process and their interaction

with each other. This can be considered the main innovative aspect of distance learning, since the classical version of education in a university does not imply such interaction (Smit et al., 2018). On the other hand, T.I. Yashina (2008) points to the role of information and communication technologies in distance learning. According to the researcher, "... information, communication technologies of distance learning create excellent conditions for self-mastering of English by a student, thanks to the use of electronic courses. This is especially true for people who do not have direct access to traditional, full-time forms of education". In addition, the author draws attention to other advantages of distance learning: "Today, we can work with a computer using a graphic tablet with a pen. With their help, the user not only performs actions available to the mouse, but can also make handwritten notes on educational materials in much the same way as with a standard pen or pencil. At the same time, the user gets the opportunity to self-examine the performed actions using a computer software" (Yashina, 2008). In this regard, the results of foreign researchers are of interest. In particular, J. Smit et al. (2018), exploring the prospects for the development of training programmes, note the complexity of this issue: "Anyone who seeks to develop, based on research, an innovative distance education programme for reading, faces a number of problems. There are many tips in the literature on what to focus on in this area, but the tips are often very generic". On the other hand, researching the same issue, E. Rye and K. Crites (2020) point to good results that have been obtained by educators when introducing the latest innovations in distance learning "... this approach can be applied to many teaching projects and provide excellent results". The study focused on the use of new listening methods when teaching to read.

In turn, E.C. Boling et al. (2018), conducting a study of specific methods for online training courses, note the high efficiency of distance learning, provided that special software is used. "Interviews and course materials were collected from one online course instructor and 11 graduate students from different fields of study. The data obtained indicate the success of the study of the curriculum by students learning to read online using Web 2.0, as well as in the presence of constant feedback from the teacher in Skype to ensure better learning efficiency" (Boling et al., 2018). Thus, online classes with foreign students in Skype are widely used, allowing the teacher to personally control the process of mastering the technique of reading in English by foreign students and to answer the students' questions. The issues of learning to read in a foreign language (English in particular) are the subject of active research and are repeatedly discussed in academic literature. With the growth of the Internet around the world, the emergence of new, innovative approaches to the learning process, the relevance of further research in this area will only increase. This directly and indirectly confirms the annual increase in platforms for online learning and the improvement of their technical capabilities.

Conclusions

Research of the questions of innovative approach to the process of distance learning gave the following results. Firstly, in Ukrainian higher institutions, classes with foreign students have been successfully conducted for a long time in the framework of the studied direction. Secondly: the level of technical equipment of Ukrainian educational institutions is quite high, which makes it possible to successfully solve the issues of distance learning to read in English. Thirdly: the problem of distance education is becoming especially acute in view of the global pandemic of coronavirus disease, and this applies to various areas of education, including teaching English. Fourthly, among the many innovative technologies used in the modern higher education system, good results have been achieved using online distance learning platforms. This innovation allows attracting more participants to the learning process and make the process of learning to read in English as clear, understandable, and easy as possible. Fifthly, research in the field of innovative technologies of distance education has been successfully carried out in various countries for a long time. In addition to the reasons listed above, this is due to the general development of Internet technologies.

The study revealed serious prerequisites for the further development of innovative teaching technologies and the improvement of distance education in general and learning to read in English in particular. All this will be of great importance in the context of improving the quality of distance education in Ukraine and other countries. In general, the study confirmed the prospects for further developments within the framework of the issue under study and the relevance of the chosen direction of research.

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