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Abstract

The article discusses and conducts a thorough analysis of the peculiarities of teaching foreign languages in distance, blended, and hybrid learning formats. The global landscape of higher education is undergoing significant changes as digital technologies give a powerful impetus to the rapid growth of distance learning, gradually replacing traditional methods. This shift towards digital learning has resulted in more engaging, diverse, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary learning experiences. The article explores the advantages, challenges, and disadvantages associated with distance, blended, and hybrid learning approaches.

These methods offer the opportunity to choose a specific learning format based on the students' language proficiency level. Successful implementation of such teaching methods requires flexibility and a creative approach to presenting materials in non-conventional formats. The article explores the prospects and possibilities of these teaching methods while aiming to address and overcome existing challenges through various strategies and approaches. It emphasizes that such training should not diminish or undermine the role and significance of the instructor, reducing them to mere internet experts. Instead, the ultimate goal of this type of education is to understand how internet-based technologies can be leveraged to achieve the highest quality of teaching. The experience of Western universities both within the Republic of Armenia and abroad are described and highlighted in the article.

Keywords: Distance learning, blended learning, hybrid learning, foreign language teaching, Internet, innovative methods, and digital technologies.

Introduction:

The article acknowledges that the educational process has undergone significant changes, necessitating the utilization of teaching methods that were previously used but not as intensively. These methods needed to be updated and revitalized to ensure effectiveness, convenience, and ease of use in the teaching process. The shift to online learning during the pandemic posed challenges that required the exploration of new ways to organize courses seamlessly and without interruptions. However, it also brought positive aspects, such as increased computer usage during lessons. It is widely recognized that capturing the audience's attention begins with generating their interest. Over the years, there has been a continuous effort to enhance course programs, aiming to significantly increase student interest and motivation. Innovative technologies play a crucial role in achieving this goal.

Given the demands of the modern world, the article acknowledges that educators are increasingly incorporating internet resources into their courses to varying degrees.

Currently, higher education in the Republic of Armenia is undergoing significant changes due to globalization and digitization. The rapid growth of distance learning and the emergence of various online platforms for language education have expanded the horizons for delivering and acquiring educational material. Although the learning objectives remain the same, the methods of delivering the material have evolved.

Modern digital technologies offer the opportunity to learn a foreign language not only in the traditional classroom setting but also from the comfort of one's own home. Independent work has become an integral part of the modern educational process, promoting student self-education and motivation. Traditional methods alone are no longer sufficient for meeting the requirements of the 21st century. The use of innovative technologies to the fullest extent is crucial for the achievement of better results, consequently, digital technologies are replacing traditional learning methods, with face-to-face lectures being replaced by presentations, reading materials, listening to recordings, and watching videos and films. To enhance the learning experience and make it more engaging, mixed or hybrid learning methods are recommended.

In contrast to traditional, distance, and blended learning, hybrid learning is a newer approach that combines classroom-based instruction with remote interaction through computers. Unlike asynchronous online learning, the hybrid format enables instructors to maintain high-quality communication with both physically present and remote groups in a synchronous format. Instructors can actively monitor student engagement, ask and answer questions, observe audience reactions, and gauge the need for additional explanations. Successful implementation of the hybrid method requires advanced digital technologies, a willingness to experiment with new methods, and an objective evaluation of their effectiveness in specific contexts.

When implementing a hybrid course, there are several negative aspects that instructors may face. Firstly, instructors must review and adapt their teaching methods to effectively engage both in-person and remote students, which requires attracting the attention of the physical audience while ensuring the participation of distance learners. Another challenge is the age limit, as adults may not readily adapt to innovative technologies, requiring them to first learn and then apply them in the classroom. Technical requirements also pose difficulties, such as providing high-quality speakers to ensure clear audio for both in-person and remote students, which is crucial for uninterrupted learning. Additionally, the recording of the entire teaching process in a hybrid model raises concerns regarding the attitudes of both teachers and students [Hrastinski, 565].

On the one hand, hybrid learning preserves direct contact for those who prefer in-person learning. On the other hand, it allows for independent study and subsequent discussion in a natural interactive setting, facilitated by the technologies utilized. This approach benefits older individuals who are unable to attend classes due to work commitments. Hybrid learning renders printed literature redundant, and it requires students to be independent, self-aware, and organized, which may be lacking in some students.

In the context of teaching a foreign language through distance, blended, or hybrid learning, it becomes possible to involve language-speaking professors or select materials with the participation of native speakers through internet resources. This method facilitates teamwork, although the presence of an assistant may be necessary to handle technical or internet issues, to avoid unnecessary time wastage by the instructor.

Each of the mentioned teaching methods provides an opportunity for students to learn not only the subject matter but also technology skills. While the workload of lecturers has significantly

increased in adapting to new teaching methods, various online conferences and courses offered by universities allow lecturers to improve their skills and acquire digital competencies.

However, it is important to note that these advancements should not undermine or diminish the personality of the lecturer, reducing them to mere internet experts and turning the teaching process into a staged performance. The ultimate goal is to understand how the combination of digital technologies, developing methods, and tools can be used to achieve the most effective teaching practices. Therefore, teachers must continuously develop new teaching and learning skills.

Hybrid learning promotes flexibility, adaptability to unconventional conditions, and the utilization of more interesting tools and methods. Classical education will not disappear, as there will always be individuals who prefer traditional methods, which can positively impact the educational process. Both classical and hybrid learning methods are viable, and rather than opposing them, a combination of methods and making appropriate choices is beneficial. Blended or hybrid learning is becoming a reality in education and is expected to continue in the future. However, for foreign language teaching, the classroom remains the primary form of education, with mixed learning serving as an additional approach.

With the development of technologies, particularly synchronous learning with students, a narrower understanding of hybrid learning has emerged, emphasizing synchronous learning in a virtual environment. Concurrent learning, which allows for face-to-face blended learning with both physically present and online participants, is considered a key characteristic of hybrid learning.

In the organization of hybrid learning, a newer model called the flexible HyFlex model has emerged. Introduced by Dr. Brian Beatty in 2006, HyFlex teaching focuses on providing students with the freedom to choose the format, timing, and pace of their learning. This approach combines in-person learning, online asynchronous learning, and online synchronous learning. The HyFlex format eliminates spatial and temporal boundaries for students, requiring new technical and methodological considerations in the educational process and fundamentally changing the course's academic approach. Implementing the hybrid format necessitates a comprehensive revision of the educational process from organizational, managerial, methodological, and technical perspectives. However, despite the advantages of HyFlex, hybrid learning as a whole does have limitations [Staker, Horn, 5] .

Both blended and hybrid learning are invaluable in teaching any subject, especially foreign languages. They significantly enhance the quality of the educational process, making it more appealing and modern, which is particularly important for the implementation of new educational programs. Many Western universities have adopted these approaches and methods, offering numerous majors through online, hybrid, blended, or distance learning. It is financially affordable, allowing students to study in a different country without a significant financial burden. Additionally, distance or hybrid learning is a suitable option for inclusive students who may have physical limitations preventing them from attending in-person classes. Furthermore, it saves time for students by eliminating the commute to and from the university. It is essential to consider the experiences of universities abroad and incorporate distance or hybrid learning methods in teaching foreign students in our own universities.

An example of a leading university in this regard is the University of Central Florida (UCF), one of the largest universities in the United States. UCF has been a pioneer in digital learning for nearly two decades, offering distance and blended learning options. Currently, blended and interactive courses constitute almost one-third of the subjects taught at the university. Blended learning offers cost savings, allowing for increased student enrollment. Without blended learning, the Florida campus would have required additional physical space to accommodate the influx of students seeking only

face-to-face learning. By adopting this approach, the university saved an estimated \$150 million in construction costs. The University Center for Distributed Learning, consisting of a team of 90 individuals, including curriculum developers, media specialists, faculty enhancement specialists, and quality assurance specialists, ensures the quality of courses transitioning from face-to-face to digital learning. Lecturers involved in distance teaching undergo advanced quality improvement courses, totaling approximately 80 hours. The team regularly meets with deans to discuss new online teaching methods, contributing to the continuous improvement of education quality each year. [Remote Possibility]

Arizona State University, a prominent public research institution located in the Greater Phoenix area, is recognized for its leadership in digital technology and digital learning. With approximately 80,000 students, the university adopts a multi-layered approach to digital learning, catering to different groups of students. ASU Online offers a range of online programs for working adults, while iCourses provide flexible online course options for students seeking a customizable schedule. To support the operation of all digital learning programs, Arizona State University employs a team of 300 individuals, including faculty, subject matter specialists, media and technology specialists, student support staff, analysts, and other specialists. Student support is a priority, with professors available 24/7, and a dedicated technical support department providing individual and comprehensive assistance. The university consistently improves the quality of online teaching through student surveys each semester. The number of online learners at Arizona State University is significantly higher than in-person learners, resulting in lower costs per student. Over the past seven years, tuition costs have been reduced by approximately 50% [Online learning suits diverse student needs] .

Blended learning, a term coined by foreign educators in the late 1990s, gained more thorough exploration and methodological suggestions in the 2006 publication by Curtis J. Bonk and Charles R. Graham, entitled "The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs" [Schoblick, 521-523]. This method is widely used in universities, schools, and colleges worldwide, remaining relevant due to the efforts of many educators. Blended learning allows for a more relaxed and creative approach to education, making it not only easier but also noticeably more interesting.

Blended learning combines traditional methods with distance learning, distinguishing it from hybrid learning, where additional learning takes place outside the classroom with students. Unlike distance and hybrid learning, which are generally easier to organize and accessible for students residing abroad, blended learning maintains a physical connection between the lecturer and the student.

In the context of teaching a foreign language, blended learning allows students to engage in active communicative activities with their peers and the teacher, aiming for a deeper understanding of the subject. This interactive learning approach incorporates feedback, which can be provided by the lecturer or fellow students. Feedback plays a crucial role in guiding learners' actions and improving their subsequent steps towards achieving the learning objectives.

Today, blended learning occupies a prominent position in educational organization, as it enables the combination of traditional and innovative methods. It provides opportunities for both knowledge acquisition and communication, leveraging various technologies to enhance the education sector. Blended learning minimizes the loss of taught information by utilizing appropriate platforms for content delivery and retention.

Blended learning indeed injects interest into the teaching process by combining traditional and digital methods. By incorporating technology, blended learning encourages students to engage in self-learning, whether acquiring computer knowledge or mastering the subject material itself. The

flexibility of blended learning also allows for time and space savings, benefiting both students and educators.

The purpose of blended learning is to create a platform, facilitated by technology that provides all the necessary course materials, teaching methodologies, exercises, tests, and recommended literature. Rather than delivering knowledge in a ready state, the aim is to convey key concepts and methodological support, empowering students to engage in self-education and improve the quality of their independent work. Unlike hybrid learning, blended learning maintains continuous physical connection between teachers and students.

Various platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, YouTube, Quizlet, Moodle, PlayPosit, and Zoom have become integral resources for blended learning. These platforms achieve two main goals: ensuring continuity of learning and facilitating an individualized approach aligned with educational programs. The use of internet platforms is convenient as they can be accessed via computers and mobile phones, allowing teachers to monitor student progress and the completion of assignments [Roche, 118].

The first goal of continuity of learning is particularly relevant for students who may have missed classes or have knowledge gaps. Platforms like Moodle, which have gained widespread use globally since their creation in 2002, provide accessible lectures and materials for students to catch up on missed content. Students can review posted lecture materials, engage in active discussions during class, ask questions, respond to their peers and the lecturer, and strengthen their understanding through quizzes or other assignments.

Blended learning also emphasizes an individualized approach. Platforms offer assignments of varying levels, allowing students who need additional support to independently work on the material. For example, WhatsApp can be used as a component of blended learning by creating a group for the teacher and students to communicate solely in the foreign language being taught. This platform enables the lecturer to provide individual feedback to students and address their mistakes. Blended learning leverages technology to enhance education, providing flexibility, individualization, and access to information anytime, anywhere. However, the role of the lecturer remains crucial in facilitating and guiding the learning process. Therefore, blended learning offers a comprehensive approach that combines the benefits of both traditional and digital methods.

Blended learning, with the integration of platforms like PlayPosit and Kahoot, has proven to be engaging and effective for many students. While some students may initially find it challenging to combine traditional textbooks with digital platforms, a wide range of students welcome the blended learning approach as it enhances the learning experience and makes it more interesting.

PlayPosit is a platform that enables instructors to post foreign language videos and create questions based on the content. The video pauses at specific points, and students must answer the questions before the video continues. This interactive approach encourages students to actively listen, understand, and respond to the questions, reinforcing their comprehension of the material.

Another platform, Kahoot, adds an element of gamification to the course. It allows for quizzes in a game-like format, making the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable. With over 50 million registered users, Kahoot offers resources for organizing discussions, quizzes, and polls. Users can create tests with multiple-choice questions, incorporate images and videos, and set time limits for responses.

Conclusion

distance learning platforms for foreign language education are continuously evolving and offering more possibilities. Instructors are no longer confined to classroom hours, which provides them with the opportunity to cater to students' individual needs and intensify their support based on their progress. The teacher assumes the role of a guide between the vast resources available on the internet and the students, facilitating self-education and motivation. Drawing from the experiences of US universities, it is evident that a transition to distance or hybrid learning models is not only possible but also necessary to attract international students. Considering these factors, it is likely that distance, blended, or hybrid learning will become increasingly sought-after methods in the near future.

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