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## DISTANCE

LEARNING OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

### APRENDIZAJE A DISTANCIA DE UN IDIOMA EXTRANJERO

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#### ABSTRACT

The process of globalization and the rapid development of the knowledge-based economy require the formation of quality human capital, for which attention to educational issues has been reaffirmed as a priority for all countries. The foregoing, added to the health crisis caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, has conditioned that the educational system to adapt to more flexible forms of teaching. Thus, although since the 20th century the form of distance education began to occupy an important place in the educational policy of the advanced countries of the world, in this context it is presented as one of the most viable and attractive. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to analyze the potentialities and steps taken for the implementation of distance education strategies in Azerbaijan, and specifically the impact and possibilities of this concept in the process of learning foreign languages. Conditioned by the above, the analysis of documents and the historical-logical method were the main research methods used in the investigation.

**Keywords:** distance education, ICTs, foreign language teaching

#### RESUMEN

El proceso de globalización y el rápido desarrollo de la economía basada en el conocimiento exigen la formación de capital humano de calidad, por lo que la atención a los temas educativos se ha reafirmado como una prioridad para todos los países. Lo anterior, sumado a la crisis sanitaria provocada por la pandemia del COVID 19, ha condicionado que el sistema educativo se adapte a formas de enseñanza más flexibles. Así, si bien desde el siglo XX la modalidad de educación a distancia comenzó a ocupar un lugar importante en la política educativa de los países avanzados del mundo, en este contexto se presenta como una de las más viables y atractivas. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar las potencialidades y los pasos dados para la implementación de estrategias de educación a distancia en Azerbaiyán, y específicamente el impacto y las posibilidades de este concepto en el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. Condicionado por lo anterior, el análisis de documentos y el método histórico-lógico fueron los principales métodos de investigación utilizados en la investigación.

**Palabras clave:** educación a distancia, TIC, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras

## INTRODUCTION

As pointed out by da Silva et al., (2021) an educational environment is a space dedicated to learning, supporting pedagogical, psychological, and sociocultural conditions. The environment influences the development of the students' personality and creates conditions for the improvement of their skills. In addition, it reveals students' individual characteristics, interests, and talents. These environments ensure the interaction and cooperation of teachers and students (Ilyashenko et al., 2019). However, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has proven to be a massive challenge for the entire world, imposing a radical transformation in many areas of life, including education. The education system, which has been affected at all levels, has been required to respond to the crisis, forced to transition into emergency modes, and adapt to the unprecedented impact of the global crisis (Bozkurt et al., 2022). In this context, distance education is becoming an increasingly prominent alternative.

According to Liu & Yen (2014) distance education, originated in mid-18th century, aiming to compensate the insufficiency of traditional education. It rapidly developed from correspondence courses and tapes to the release of personal computers and the applications of computer-based multimedia applications. The maturity of network technology has computer-based network technology become the advantageous media in current Distance Education, which provides more flexibilities and learning opportunities. Thus, the emphasis of Lifelong Learning has challenged the traditional ideas of schools being the final learning places. This way although distance learning (DL) traditionally focused on nontraditional students, such as full-time workers, military personnel, and nonresidents or individuals in remote regions who are unable to attend classroom lectures DL has become an established part of the educational world, with trends pointing to ongoing growth.

Heriyanto et al., (2021) establish that the distinguishing characteristics of distance learning are the separation between the lecturer and students in space or time; the volitional control of learning by students, rather than the distant lecturer; and the noncontiguous communication between students and the lecturer, all of which are mediated by some form of technology. Distance learning is expected to adopt an instructional model where teaching is not only about the way in which information is communicated to students but also the way in which students make sense and construct new knowledge from the information presented. A distance learning environment should thus enable students to construct knowledge under the guidance of the lecturer, and then report their progress back

to the lecturer through a designated distance learning platform. Hence, the basic model of distance learning is to offer distant students an experience similar to the traditional, face-to-face instruction through a two-way audiovisual interaction.

Nevertheless, this shift from traditional classroom education to online distance education affects various aspects of educational practices. In the online learning environment, instructors do not directly observe students' learning tasks, and students do not interact face to face with instructors and other students during learning activities. Consequently, the lack of physically social presence influences students' engagement and leads to the development of a sense of isolation, which is a key element for the high dropout rate of online learning (Salta et al., 2022). That's why Wagner et al., (2021) highlight the teacher's responsibility and the need of high-quality teaching materials, the content of which requires constant updating and improvement, while the experience of the traditional organization of the educational process needs to be adapted to the new communication system between the teacher and the student. Under such conditions, the teacher acts not only as of the developer of the electronic version of the educational and methodological support of their subject but also as the supervisor of cognitive processes (Rogerson-Revell, 2015).

The International Association of Universities report (2020) has identified three main challenges to online and distance education: (1) technical infrastructure and accessibility, (2) distance learning competencies and pedagogies, and (3) the field of study. The report concludes that the growing digital divide and socioeconomic inequalities with large groups of students, the disparities in online learning, and the lack of teaching preparation by the faculty are a few notable challenges and topics in the field of higher education and international education (Chan et al., 2021). Taking this into account, the objective of this paper is to analyze the potentialities and steps taken for the implementation of distance education strategies in Azerbaijan. To do this, through the analysis of documents, some historical peculiarities of distance education were analyzed, and their adaptation to the specific teaching of languages.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Some history of distance education

If we look at the history of distance education, it is clear that people have long tried to automate learning, whether or not there is a tutor nearby. Finally, with the advent of a regular and reliable postal system, this idea became a

reality. Students who receive study materials by mail correspond with teachers, take exams and write scientific articles. Textbooks sent by mail allow you to study psychology, economics, as well as foreign languages. Thus, the concept of “Distance education” appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century although it developed further in the next century. For example, in 1840, British educator Sir Isaac Pitman taught shorthand by mail (using a penny post). In 1856, the Frenchman Charles Toussaint and the German Gustav Langenscheidt founded a letter training school in Berlin. In the 1870s, Illinois Wesleyan University began a home-schooling program. In 1883, a Correspondence University was established in Ithaca, New York and in 1892, William Rainey Harper opened a distance learning center at the University of Chicago to advance education (Ismayilova, 2021, p. 16).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, distance education grew to a great extent with the conceptualization of various theories that can be considered foundational such as: 1) **the theory of autonomy and independence**, 2) **the theory of industrialized teaching and learning** and 3) **the theory of transactional distance**. In addition, as is normal in science, development has not stopped and there are currently other emerging theories such as: 1) **connectivism**, 2) **the community of inquiry model**, 3) **an extended spatial model of e-education** and 4) **a pedagogy–andragogy–heutagogy continuum** (Jung, 2019, pp. 4–5).

American scientist Michael Graham Moore, who is considered a referent of distance education pedagogy and the author of one of the main theories of distance education, is known for his great contribution to the field, he is the author of transactional distance theory (Moore, 1973). Transactional distance theory made an important contribution to the development of distance education theory. Moore classified distance education programs using the training and teaching programs of the learner: The first group includes programs in which students are completely independent, that is, they have the freedom to decide what to learn (goals), how to learn (skills), and how much to learn (evaluation). The second group includes programs that assume that students are completely free to make decisions about the curriculum (Muslimova, 2021).

Otto Peters, a German scholar who contributed to the conceptual development of distance education, follows Moore in describing dialogue, structure, and free choice as the three main components of distance education. Peters notes that the individual, as the main component of the pedagogical criterion, no longer acts as “the subject of his own training, upbringing, and not the object of pedagogical guidance, and forced influences.” According

to him, students “organize, monitor, check and evaluate their own learning when they understand their learning needs and form learning goals, choose learning strategies, learning materials and tools correctly, identify physical resources and use them” (Madatov, 2021, pp. 93–97)

In the case of Russia distance education began to emerge in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however after the revolution of 1917, a new model of distance education was developed in the Soviet Union, which was called correspondence education (Amrahova, 2017, pp. 116–123). The emergence of radio and television at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also led to the spread and development of distance education. The University of Pennsylvania, which was the first to provide distance education through radio, began broadcasting in 1922. In 1938, many universities and colleges began broadcasting educational programs to public schools via radio. Broadcasting of classes included question-and-answer, reading, performing various tasks, and writing confirmation documents. In 1939, more than 400 programs were presented on television. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1946, the University of South Africa (UNISA) opened a department called the Department of External Study, becoming one of the 11 major universities offering distance education (Jafarova, 2021, pp. 376–394).

In 1948, University of Louisville Chancellor John Wilkinson Taylor predicted that radio would advance American education by 25 years. The establishment of the Open University in Great Britain in 1969 had a strong influence on the development of distance education. Then, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the application of the Internet in the field of education gave impetus to the development of distance education. New technologies have brought a new understanding to the concept of education. The students, despite being in different geographical locations, had access to the training program, teacher advice, as well as video, audio and text materials via the Internet. In 1972, “National University of Distance Education” was established in Spain. In general, in 1972-1985, in many countries of the world (Spain, Korea, Thailand, Canada, etc.), educational institutions specialized in distance learning appeared.

In order to spread knowledge and ensure its effective use in Turkey, the Council of Higher Education published the “Regulation on distance higher education based on inter-university communication and information technologies” in the official newspaper No. 23906 dated December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1999. It is clear from all that we have said that distance education is not a new concept, it is a form of education that has been known all over the world for years and has undergone a certain development. Even today, distance

education programs are widely used, and are distinguished by a number of features.

### Implementation of distance education in Azerbaijan

The date of the official establishment of distance education in Azerbaijan is June 19th, 2009, when the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education" was adopted. According to the 13<sup>th</sup> article of this law, along with full-time, part-time, independent (externship) forms of education, there is also distance (distance) education. In that law, distance education is evaluated as a form of education in which the educational process is organized on the basis of electronic, telecommunication, and software-technical means.

The use of electronic lessons was started by the Ministry of Education within the framework of the "Program for providing general education schools with information and communication technologies in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2005-2007 years)". The creation of electronic resources and their application to the educational process were further expanded within the framework of the "2008-2012 State Program for Informatization of the Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan".

Since 2011, in addition to face-to-face education, distance education services have been implemented in the Education-Innovation Center of ANAS Institute of Information Technologies. Nakhchivan Branch of ANAS, Nakhchivan State University and other higher education institutions located in Nakhchivan have received distance education by taking advantage of this service. An important action to highlight is that on October 9, 2014, the Distance Learning Center of the Institute of Information Technologies was established in the Ganja Branch of ANAS (Ozby, 2020, pp. 189–192).

In addition, the "State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan" was approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev dated October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The fourth strategic direction of the strategy includes the creation of infrastructure in accordance with the training methodology based on information and communication technologies in educational institutions, the rationalization of the network of educational institutions and other measures, as well as distance education.

Recently, with the help of innovations in the field of education and the Internet, the possibilities of distance education have greatly expanded and started to be used more often. However, to implement distance education is important to have a stable internet connection, knowledge of ICT (Information Communication Technologies), software

to implement this form of education, etc., so the person needs to be familiar with these resources. According to Chan et al., (2021) the most common way to provide students with remote instruction is the use of audio and video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, Skype). Since the COVID-19 lockdown, the use of audio and video conferencing has become crucial for faculty members and staff to present content in multiple ways and formats. In this sense various audio-video, multimedia technologies, electronic textbooks, automatic design systems, e-mails, electronic boards, and teleconferences are methodically used in the implementation of distance education in Azerbaijani schools since no paper textbook provides such multimedia capabilities.

In addition to Zoom, Google Meet and Skype we believe that MOODLE (Modular-Object-Oriented-Dynamic-Learning-Environment) system is one of the most convenient software for distance education in the world. One of the advantages of this program is that it is free. The Moodle program is translated into 82 languages and is used in 212 countries around the world. The system has the capacity to cover 50000 students and hundreds of courses. The software is compatible with the main platforms such as Windows, Linux, Mac OS X, and it allows webinars and online conferences be organized through MOODLE.

Distance education is a historical step in the development and evolution of the information society, a requirement of globalization, regardless of the education policy of any country. Today, systematic education has been organized in the world based on different technologies, so one of the important directions of the educational policy of international organizations, societies, including UNESCO, is the development of this systems. This way, UNESCO has created a global network university. In order to further accelerate the integration of the higher education institution into the global education system, in 2018 distance education was launched for the first time among the higher education institutions of our country at Nakhchivan State University. On the basis of the electronic university project created at the university, anyone who wants to study from any country can apply to the university's website and connect to the distance education center with various electronic devices - computers, mobile phones and tablets. Important steps have been taken and plans have been made for teaching offline and online courses within the framework of the multifunctional distance education program.

Today, the creation of ICT technologies, the formation of mass and accessible higher education promptly solves the problems of staffing of the economy and supports the formation of a positive image of the country at the global

level. However, since virtual education is built and developed on real education, the content of education is determined by the same criteria in both cases - national education standards. This is recognized, which is why education is a priority issue in state policy.

### Distance learning of a foreign language

In modern times, foreign language teaching requires the application of new methods and methodologies. Mutual relations with countries of the world in the political, economic, cultural spheres open new stages in the process of communication. This also requires setting new theoretical and practical problems in foreign language teaching and finding solutions.

When we conduct historical research, we see that the connection between language and informatics began in the 50s of the last century. At that time, a form of studying foreign languages by correspondence was organized in Berlin by J. Toussaint, a French language teacher at the University of Berlin, and G. Langenscheidt, a member of the Berlin Society for Modern Languages. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, work in this field was intensified, and it was applied in France, Canada, Russia and other countries. As a result of the joint activity of linguists with technology engineers, language automation has led to the development of various translation programs as well as digital dictionaries and encyclopedias. From the next decades, we will witness the development of logical connections between the information technologies of the language and the social demand for learning various foreign languages in the society (Voznesenskaya, 2017, pp. 155–157).

In the last decades of the last century, the availability of computers led to an increase in the demand for learning foreign languages. At the same time, it should be noted that different languages have been taught through structured learning for centuries. The development of information technologies began to introduce new tools for learning and teaching different foreign languages. Currently, various programs are being developed in developed countries to facilitate the teaching of different languages. Since its inception, the computer has remained a tool used for language learning. It should be noted that since the late 1990s, technology entered a new stage of development, and the independent use of computers began to grow rapidly. The rapid spread of the Internet during this period encouraged the further development of this method. The transmission of the Internet further accelerated development as it made existing materials more accessible (Moore, 2007, pp. 25–32).

As it can be seen, the role of computer technology in the teaching and dissemination of languages is greater among the technological tools. A number of issues should be considered in learning and promoting languages through computer technology such as: a) creation of artificial intelligence, b) creation of an automatic text annotation and summarization system, c) creating an automatic translation system, d) development of automatic text generation systems, e) automatic editing of texts, f) creation of teaching systems, g) creation of speech recognition systems, h) creation of expert systems, etc. (Peters, 1998, p. 135).

It should also be noted that all the possibilities of the taught and promoted language must be fully accommodated in the computer system. If the user enters any information in that language into the computer, he should get information that will carefully examine the components of the information, word composition, and clarify the ideas there. In short, this system should present other languages to the user in the same way as it reflects all the competence of English or Russian language

From all this, it is clear that today, thanks to technology and related programs, we can learn a language at any time, regardless of place and time. Also, we would like to highlight that distance learning of a foreign language is not carried out with the help of only one technical tool because different technical means are used in the distance education process: textbooks, CDs, videos, etc. The organization of language courses on television and radio with voice, video, as well as the ability to speak, the use of Skype, Zoom, teams and many similar programs is increasing, and foreign language courses taught through web pages continue to grow. It should also be noted that Microsoft Teams-upgraded in November 2016 and during the pandemic, the use of this program has increased significantly. Microsoft Teams, has integrated with Office 365 programs, enabling to share files created on your computer via Teams. Thus, we can say that as information transmission technologies improve, distance education becomes more and more effective and in demand (Akhmedov & Alimuradova, 2021, pp. 15–23).

As pointed out by Gurcan & Cagiltay (2020), researchers from different fields like psychology, cognitive science, human-computer interaction, sociology, instructional system design, education and communication have been contributing this area to develop strategies and systems for enhancing distance learning platforms and their adoption to the society. Today distance learning platforms are being implemented in several different forms to support the current education programs, to improve the accessibility of the education programs and to create a wide spectrum of

access possibilities to the education. Hence, this subject is an important one to improve the traditional teaching and learning environments.

## CONCLUSIONS

Given the challenges imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic, distance education is one of the most viable alternatives to continue the teaching process, although examples of its proper use prior to this emergency situation can be found in the academic literature. However, given the characteristics of this type of teaching, a greater commitment and preparation is required on the part of both students and teachers, the latter having the responsibility of directing the process in the most efficient way possible. In this sense, in order for the lesson to be effective the teacher should use multimedia resources, computer technology with special effects of images and sounds, or by using audio-visual tools to enable the students to better understand in this difficult situation.

In Azerbaijan the use of distance education has made significant steps since the promulgation of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education". However, despite state efforts to date, as in other countries, there are difficulties in its implementation, especially in rural areas. Specifically in language teaching, it has been proven that distance education can be an interesting strategy with positive experiences like in various countries. The use of ICT in the classroom have been proven useful for various purposes like improving speech and language skills, increasing professional skills, developing didactic material for working on projects of different levels, etc. This ultimately contributes to improving the communication skills of students, who by using various software are not restricted to the limited interaction that can be provided in the lessons.

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