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Distance Learning: New Challenges in the Teaching of German and Russian Languages for Specific Purposes


Extended summary

The paper presents the findings of an exploratory research of quantitative approach which was conducted using the method of systematic non-experimental observation, in which statistical analyses were a substitute for experimental controls with the aim to provide answers to the following questions:

- Does online teaching make learning a foreign language more difficult or easier?
- What is the structure of the relationship between the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents and the forms of teaching that have proven to be interesting and useful, and those that have been assessed as less suitable for working in the online mode?
- Does the assessment of students regarding the question of whether online teaching makes learning a foreign language easier or more difficult correspond to the success of the use of ICT?

The research was placed in the context of theories underlying the self-regulation of learning, in which motivational aspects are at the top of the inclusion list (Bandura, Deci, Ryan, Sternberg) and which define self-regulation as control over oneself, which also includes aligning behavior with goals as personal standards, of particular importance being the connection between self-regulation and proactivity in learning and teaching as their essential characteristics, as well as the fact that in the approach to learning, an individual transforms his or her own mental abilities into academic skills.

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The sample is convenient, consisting of 107 students of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Belgrade, teaching departments of this faculty in Vršac and Novi Pazar, and the Preschool Teacher Training College in Vršac.

A Likert-type questionnaire with two parts was used as the instrument in the survey (the first part was designed to collect general data about the respondents (predictive variables): gender, age, institution of education, year of study, foreign language (German or Russian), grade in the foreign language being studied and length of study; the second part (10 questions) was used to collect information on the above questions). The reliability of this instrument, expressed by Cronbach's α coefficient, is adequate ($\alpha=.87$).

Based on the findings, it was concluded that both the general and working hypotheses were confirmed. The success of the use of ICT supports this thesis, as can be seen from the fact that students who use hypermedia content for learning a foreign language emphasize that online teaching facilitates learning, while students who do not use ICT for learning a foreign language believe that both types of teaching have their advantages, and they equate their assessments of the advantages of online teaching with what is otherwise provided by direct teaching. This finding could be attributed to the inadequacy of the use of ICT in the field of foreign language learning by half of the respondents, because they are less committed to it, and a step further, to the motivational factors that underlie these findings. The reasons for not using online opportunities for learning a foreign language were not directly in the focus of this research, but the assumption is that they should be sought in motivation, as an essential part of the self-regulation of learning. However, the findings related to technical problems, communication problems, and specific technical problems (a lack of digital literacy, auditory and visual connectivity in online classes, etc.) indicate limiting factors, i.e. the importance of this issue for further research.

Related to the aforementioned are the more complex issues of personalization of learning and, within it, the adequacy of technological innovations to encourage motivation and self-regulation as a significant indicator of the scarcer use of ICT for learning a foreign language for specific purposes. The findings of the research, which singles out the use of ICT for learning a foreign language as the only significant predictor of a positive direction in the set of predictors and criterion variables, confirm the findings of the previous research which state that there are already quite developed programs that encourage the self-regulation of learning, by providing a framework in which a student can create different content and use the HTML language to obtain information on various topics (texts, diagrams, images, graphs, tables, audio and video clips...), in other words, the tools for learning a foreign language, as well as programs that provide cognitive tools for creating, sharing and exchanging information objects, etc. Focusing on the research of learning strategies supports learning, provided that students are motivated to use them, but this is not always easy to achieve in teaching practice. In connection with the above, significant findings indicate the problem of the inadequacy of many learning style models and their partial overlap. Among the aspects related to skills, the following stand out as the most suitable for acquisition in an online environment: translation, listening, reading, and conversation. In addition, the respondents also recognize better cooperation among participants in online classes, better acquisition of knowledge, and greater availability of materials as important aspects and skills, which indicates that students find forms and contents that match their level of knowledge and interests. As for the suggestions for practitioners, the conclusion remains that more time and at-

tention should be devoted to the personalization of learning, that is, to the possibilities of adapting the hypermedia to the individual profile of students (level of knowledge, goals, interests or motivation, which is in most cases introjected, which is confirmed by the findings of other researchers). This is particularly highlighted in the findings that students better accept work on a well-adapted platform than in an online class.

Keywords: distance learning, foreign languages for specific purposes, German language, Russian language.

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