SOME ASPECTS OF EFL DISTANCE LEARNING IN UKRAINE
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Focusing on language, communication, and culture in the national standards for foreign language learning, foreign language teachers are continually searching for better ways of accessing authentic materials and providing experiences that will improve their students' knowledge and skills in these target areas. As the Internet has transformed communication around the world, it is natural that it should play a major role in the foreign language classroom.

With the advent of networked computers and Internet technology, computer-based instruction has been widely used in language classrooms throughout the world. Computer technologies have dramatically changed the way people gather information, conduct research and communicate with others worldwide. Considering the tremendous startup expenses, copyright issues, objectionable materials and other potential disadvantages of technology, much research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of, and better strategies for, technology integration.

The tremendous progression of the Internet has set the ground for rapid development of distance learning on the Web, so that many universities, colleges, and private companies throughout the world have developed courses in this new medium.

The context has several characteristics that make it very favorable for the construction and fine-tuning of virtual net courses:
-the computer and network technology is available and should be tested and exploited;
-virtual courses fulfill a rapidly growing demand for distance learning because of their greater accessibility and flexibility;
-virtual courses have to offer much more than traditional courses to be fully justified;
-there is an ongoing competition between the training institutions for developing net sites and courses in order to maintain or augment their share of the market, both locally and internationally.

Chernivtsi Trade and Economics Institute of Kyiv National Trade and Economics University as well sets distance learning as one of the priorities and provides distance learning courses first of all for the correspondence students. But still it is only a helpful tool for students and professors and doesn't replace the whole course of studies.

The consequence is that distance learning courses are getting more and more sophisticated, and course designers are geared towards integrating several technologies for presenting text, sound, images, animations, and video in sites for a rich multimodal interaction. That trend has a direct impact on the scope, complexity, and cost of the projects. Until recently, the courses available on the Internet were only made of hypertext documents. The ever-increasing capacity of bandwidth now gives access to more sophisticated technologies.

Modern sites now include different types of information and more complex functions or tools such as:
-directory of information about the students, the tutors, and the professors;
-guides on the administrative rules and procedures of the institutions (e.g., forms, deadlines);
-announcements and schedules of various events;
-texts of compulsory readings for the students;
-list of relevant sites with external links;
-educational resources;
-list of e-mail addresses;
-newsgroups and guides about the rules of the virtual community;
-tools for on-line collaborative work;
-on-line tests and questionnaires and control and log tools, etc.

The majority of Web sites devoted to distance learning use asynchronous communication technologies (e.g., e-mail, discussion list, sites with sound and video). These are considered simple to develop and implement and not too expensive (as compared to the synchronous ones). Most sites use three basic technologies: the Web, Newsgroups, and e-mail; a few of them also use more

demanding technologies that support audio and video materials. A minority of sites, belonging to a small group of institutions, use synchronous communication technologies (e.g., chat, IP [Internet Protocol] telephony, videoconference). These require a more complex infrastructure and can cost up to twice as much as the asynchronous ones.

The choice of technologies, in each institution, depends on several factors: the availability of the supporting infrastructure, the scope of the project, the nature and criticality of the information to convey, the allotted development time, the budget capacity, and the will to surpass the competitors. Although it is a decision with big implications, the choice of technologies often seems to be made without basic information on the real performance of each technology, its effect on learning, and the implementation costs.

Web-based writing instruction has proved to be an important factor in enhancing the writing skills of English as a foreign language (EFL) students. In the study designed to examine the effectiveness of Web-based instruction in EFL freshmen students' writing, the scholars mostly find that the use of Web-based lessons as a supplement to traditional in-class writing instruction is significantly more effective than traditional teaching which depends mostly on the textbook alone.

The instant worldwide connections enabled through the Internet have changed the way people everywhere think about communication, information, and doing business. Although Internet applications are really just computer programs that know how to use the Internet to interact, one can view them as an extension of the world that we live in, an extension that brings the world to our fingertips. We can share all sorts of things with the world, get authentic materials from anywhere, and interact with people in distant locations as never before. How can Internet software enhance the classroom experience? In addition to the original Internet applications, like FTP for moving files between machines and Telnet for logging into distant computers, the wide range of features and media (text, image, sound, video, multimedia) supported by the current crop of Internet programs makes them powerful additions to the foreign language teacher's repertoire. The following list highlights a number of Internet applications that can be used to enrich the foreign language classroom:

-advantages of hypertext documents. Hypertext links do not generate, as such, a better understanding of the matter by the students. However, one can suppose that the structure of these links may have an important impact on the internal representation of knowledge.

-questionnaires and exams. The evaluation of students can easily be automated through the use of specialized programs. Self-evaluation questionnaires and final exams can be used to show the progress of the students. The evaluation systems used on the Internet are not reliable because it is difficult to clearly establish the identity of the students during the exam. Some types of exams, such as multiple choice, make fraud detection almost impossible because the responses are never personalized.

-advantages of e-mail. E-mail is certainly the service that is the most used in Web pages. In the context of distance learning, it allows the students to ask questions, demand help, and receive feedback, in addition to breaking their isolation for some of them. As such, it plays a crucial role in supporting the interaction between the professor and the student. E-mail has the big advantage of accelerating the requests for help of the students to solve technical problems, which are considered a major source of annoyance in distance learning.

-newsgroups. The dialogue between the students of a course can take place within newsgroups. The permanence of the messages can be considered as a major advantage for the students but the technology of the newsgroups is difficult to manage. The problems are numerous: necessity of a common schedule, fear of the students related to the permanence of the messages, poor group organization, divergent discourse, and necessity of a permanent regulator.

-advantages of synchronous communication technologies. The improvement of the Internet permits the use of synchronous communication technologies for distance learning. Some commercial products already propose off-the-shelf solutions to use such technologies. For some professors, there is no doubt that chat, video, and collaboration space are essential tools for distance learning. They bring some realism to the exchanges; nevertheless their advantages remain to be proven.

Most of the technology-oriented studies showed technology's positive effects on language learning. First, the advantages of using new technology in language classrooms can be interpreted in

light of the changing goals of language education and the shifting conditions in our post-industrial society. So while foreign language students were taught to write essays and read magazines a generation ago, we must now teach them to write e-mail and conduct online research. Thus, integrating technology into language classrooms is inevitable. Second, technology integration in foreign language teaching demonstrates the shift in educational paradigms from a behavioral to a constructivist learning approach. Language is a living thing, so the best way to learn a language is in interactive, authentic environments. Computer technologies and the Internet are powerful tools for assisting these approaches to language teaching. Even though constructivism is not a theory associated with using technology, constructivist assumptions are guideposts for developing a vision for integrating technology into the language curriculum.

Despite these advantages, potential drawbacks of using technology always exist. Some of the main disadvantages regarding technology integration in language classrooms include: a few common pitfalls of Internet use include objectionable materials, predators, copyright violations and plagiarism, viruses and hacking, netiquette behavior, and privacy issues.

Thus, with its advantages and disadvantages, the Internet has significant effects on communicating, teaching and learning. Both teachers and learners should have the chance of Internet accessibility, experience and familiarity with its functions in educational life. For this purpose, before using the Internet in second language learning and teaching activities, teachers and learners should be instructed. This is a must to use it in language classrooms efficiently. On the other hand, it should be known that the Internet is not sufficient itself to teach and learn a second language. In other words, it cannot include all teaching and learning activities and be replaced the real teaching and learning environment, such as language classroom and real-life communication. As a result, it is only a tool for educational activities. However, it can be implicated that the research has not concluded on the issue yet. Thus, research issue should focus on a great variety of the Internet use in language learning and teaching such as attitudes of learners and teachers towards it, individual differences on using the Internet, effective ways to use it, the suitability of educational and instructive purposes and the effects on teaching and learning. As a final point, it is possible to say that technology is not a purpose but only a tool for all humanistic necessities.

There is a race among educational institutions for building distance learning courses on the Web, in light of the anticipated benefits for the students, the institutions, and the whole society. This is another clear demonstration of the rapid and ubiquitous progression of the digital world. Here, the educational world is strongly invested. Numerous training institutions are already very active on the ground because they want to acquire experience, master and exploit the technology, adapt to the needs of their future students, be more attractive so as to conserve or improve their share of the market, have more visibility throughout the world, and be among the leading users of the new technology in education. Nevertheless, one should remind us that we still know very little about this new medium, and that the decisions to develop Web courses are still made without solid and complete justifications. In distance learning the Web may be valuable for a few courses mostly in a training program, not instead of the whole educational program of the student.