IT APPLICATIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING SESSION

THE DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Valentina Bošković Marković*,
Maja Veljković Michos,
Darija Lunić,
Katarina Nasradin,
Miloš Pupavac

Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

Under the new circumstances in education and the altered approach to teaching due to changes caused by the global pandemic, hybrid teaching has proved to be a flexible and efficient approach to the organization of the teaching process which involves combining direct work in educational institutions and distance learning system. Recognizing the numerous studies that represent significant advantages of this type of teaching process, this paper primarily focuses on the disadvantages of the online teaching model from the perspective of the protagonists of the learning process, students from different study programs who study various foreign languages.

In this context, this paper aims to present and analyze the attitudes of students toward foreign language teaching in the same higher education institution where the online teaching model has recently been applied, i.e. the hybrid model of teaching and learning. By analyzing the results of the study and students' attitudes, we strive to improve the quality of foreign language teaching in higher education, with the appropriate application of modern technologies in a hybrid teaching environment.

Keywords:

Online learning, hybrid learning, foreign languages, disadvantages, students.

INTRODUCTION

The two main terms discussed in this paper, online learning and hybrid learning, are defined based on the document published by [1] which refers to both online and hybrid learning models. In this document, online teaching is defined as a type of education that is conducted through ICT (information and communications technology). This is the most practical type of distance learning model as teaching takes place to a greater extent synchronously, i.e. in real-time, which enables better interaction. Asynchronous online classes are also represented, as students are provided with additional materials on the chosen learning platform (either in the form of PowerPoint presentations or recorded video and audio materials).

Correspondence:

Valentina Bošković Marković

e-mail:
vboskovic@singidunum.ac.rs

341

On the other hand, hybrid teaching is defined as a flexible approach to the organization of teaching, which involves a combination of direct work in the institution and distance learning. At Singidunum University, teachers had the opportunity to experience this teaching model since October 2021. To be more precise, the class is simultaneously attended by students who are absent from the classroom, as well as by students who are on the university premises. This paper places special emphasis on the online model of this combined learning and aims to investigate its disadvantages. In the previous academic year, we had the opportunity to experience only the online model of teaching, due to the epidemiological situation, whereas now we have the opportunity to compare these two models of teaching. We are a little surprised that the majority of students still opt for the online model, even though they can come to their classrooms. Classrooms are quite often empty, and more students prefer to attend lectures online. According to [2], 'online education has slowly begun to take precedence over the traditional way. Different materials become available to students through online platforms or even the whole process of education takes place through one of the numerous online platforms. Technology has helped make physical distance no longer a barrier to learning, and young people are increasingly opting for online learning.'

Telephones and computers (laptops, etc.) have become an integral part of our daily lives. Younger generations, also known as generation Z are so used to their usage that they can no longer imagine their lives or education without their usage. However, the belief that only Generation Z is used to them is wrong. Other generations that did not grow up with the use of these technologies have also become completely accustomed to them and have completely come to terms with their usage. Digital literacy is obligatory in contemporary society if one wants to be successful in almost any field, and when it comes to education, digital literacy is a prerequisite for positive results, for educators and students likewise. Moreover, it is highly likely that this trend will continue in the future and that ICT will be an inevitable part of our everyday lives, let alone of our education at all levels.

According to [3], the measures which have been taken to prevent the spread of the virus have dramatically changed the education system and forced lecturers and students around the world to quickly adapt to virtual teaching. Many have not experienced that before, so for them, it is a completely new experience both in primary and secondary schools and at universities. There have been numerous studies about new teaching models, their influences, advantages and disadvantages. This paper does not deal exclusively with either the advantages or the disadvantages of ICT in teaching, but it aims to explore how traditional and modern methods can be combined and how they can contribute to better learning and acquisition of study materials. The paper aims to analyze these issues from the students' point of view and thus contribute to better teaching. What the paper mainly focuses on is teaching foreign languages, as all authors of the paper are foreign language teachers at a private higher education institution in Serbia.

2. THE DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE TEACHING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

This paper emphasizes the disadvantages of the online teaching model for foreign language teaching, with special reference to some of the most common hurdles that teachers in primary and secondary schools may encounter. Also, we have added some examples from higher education institutions, especially at Singidunum University, as the students of this university participated in our study, and their answers have been presented to contribute to improving our teaching methods when it comes to the following foreign languages: English, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and French. In this way, we hope to combine the experiences of teachers and students in order to reach our final conclusion. According to [4] some of the main difficulties are:

- Poor internet connection and the lack of computers at home for families with more children

- It is more difficult to see the reaction of students to the given exercises, especially if the camera is not turned on during classes

- Feedback is often late until the answer is visible in the chatbox, there may be a waste of time during the class (many students prefer communication through chat than communication by using their microphone)

- Digital (il)literacy of some students - this is very rare in higher education institutions, but some individuals lack digital literacy

- The inability to verify the authenticity of students' papers and exercises, copying - it is more difficult to control the validity of papers by using the camera than by being present in the classroom

- Decreased motivation, lethargy, and inertia are becoming more and more common among students. According to the research conducted by [5, pp.76], the motivation to learn the first and second foreign languages is not the same. Research has shown that the motivation to learn English is much higher than is the case with other foreign languages - in this case, German. English is the language of global communication, lingua franca, and this research has shown that the motivation to learn it already exists and lasts longer than in the case of other foreign languages. When it comes to another foreign language, motivation is initially at an enviable level, but already after the first year of learning, it decreases rapidly. Students are satisfied with low language levels and state that it is enough for them to know how to communicate, i.e. to manage basic life situations, without any need to bring it to perfection. research on the same topic was conducted by [6, pp.226] who concluded that one of the main motives for learning German is getting a job, the importance of German in Europe, and the European Union. When we asked Singidunum University students why they choose some foreign languages, we got interesting answers: *I am learning Spanish because it sounds nice. I am learning Italian because Italians know how to enjoy life. I am learning Russian because Russians are our brothers. I am learning French because it is the language of fashion, culture, and diplomacy.*

- It is more demanding to motivate all students to participate (in the classroom students with less knowledge can participate in the class as well as students with more knowledge, the teacher can easily make the task suitable for all groups; in the online model those who know better participate more often)

- The teacher dominates the teaching much more than in the classroom, face-to-face contact leads to greater responsibility for students, they state that in the classroom they are somehow forced to participate which is very important for them, and in the online model they do not feel responsible for having to speak

- The teacher must be ready to be technical support to students and to solve technical problems as they occur

- Unrealistic results of certain students

- Sitting at the computer all day, carrying the phone all day (this is especially problematic for the kinetic type of students who learn language through movement, long-term sitting in front of the computer affects the attention of students, there are many language exercises in the classroom, not only traditionally when sitting at a desk. As an example, we can use various role-playing games in which a certain real-life situation is acted out and simulated in a foreign language)

- Lack of non-verbal communication when communicating live

- It is tiring for the eyes

- Lack of competitive spirit due to isolation from peers

- Having problems in the organization of working time

- According to [5] the biggest problem in learning another foreign language is different language levels. French, Russian and German are taught in schools and when students come to the University, they happen to have great previous knowledge. Also, there are always those who start learning the language from the beginning, and no matter how much the teacher tries to suit their needs or divide them into groups, the most diverse levels will always exist in the classroom. This is especially problematic in the online model, as in the classroom knowledge differences are easier to control and weaker students are given some less demanding tasks. The online model is often dominated by only the best.

- On the other hand, based on the results of recent research, which compared the attitudes of students and foreign language teachers toward the application of new technologies, online and traditional foreign language teaching, it was concluded that the role of teachers with their pedagogical and digital competencies is crucial in the learning process, taking into account the attitudes and needs of students, regardless of the circumstances and models of teaching that are required in the modern age [6].

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Having in mind that the opinions and attitudes of the protagonists in the teaching process (students and teachers) are the most important parameters for consideration in the teaching and learning process, to improve the quality of language teaching, this research was conducted with students of different foreign languages at Singidunum University. Since there have already been some previous studies related to the attitudes of teachers, the authors of this paper found students' opinion to be of greater importance when it comes to sharing experience related to hybrid teaching model. Moreover, if teachers want to modify and improve their classes, they cannot do it without discovering their students' requirements first. The data were collected by distributing an online questionnaire, edited by the authors of this paper, so we can conclude that this was a quantitative analysis.

A total of 213 respondents, 150 female students and 63 male students at Singidunum University in Belgrade participated in the research, conducted by the method of quantitative analysis. Respondents study various study programs within the university, and of the total number of surveyed students, 57% study at the Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, 31% are students of the Faculty of Business, 10% study at the Faculty of Informatics and Computing, while there are fewer students from Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Management (1%) and Anglistics (1%). These statistical data are in accordance with the overall number of students at these study programs.

Foreign language	Percentage (%)
Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management	57 %
Faculty of Business	31 %
Faculty of Informatics and Computing	10 %
Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Management	1 %
Anglistics	1 %

Table 1 - Overview of respondents by faculties/study programs

The higher percentage of students from the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management compared with other study programs can be explained by the fact that the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Manage-

ment is the only study program at Singidunum university where a second foreign language is studied for all 4 years of study (higher level of language learning), unlike all other programs where second foreign languages are studied for two years. Regarding the choice of the second foreign language, 105 students study German, 48 of them study Italian, 38 respondents learn Spanish, 18 students study Russian and 4 of them learn French. All students who participated in the survey also learn English, which is mandatory in all study programs and is studied 4 years.

The instrument used for this research is an anonymous online Google questionnaire that students filled out during their foreign language classes. The questions were based on the principle of multiple-choice, and students could choose one answer or more answers. In this way, the examinees managed to grasp the key concepts related to students' experience with hybrid model of teaching.

At Singidunum University, foreign language teaching is performed in a combined, i.e. hybrid model, and as it has previously been mentioned, the Microsoft Teams platform is a key tool in teaching all courses. Microsoft Teams platform offers the ability to post materials in the form of PowerPoint presentations, videos, various links, assignments, and notifications that are available to students at all times. In addition, video recordings of the lectures are available and visible immediately after class, so that students who missed the class or did not properly understand the material have the opportunity to understand it better. Also, students are enabled to download any necessary handouts, powerpoints or other materials from classes that they are interested in. They can also easily approach their teachers, as they can use chatbox or video call at any time.

Apart from all advantages that have already been mentioned, this type of teaching certainly has its disadvantages, but we were interested in the disadvantages experienced by students who learn foreign languages. The majority of respondents stated that teamwork is the weakest function of the Microsoft Teams platform and online teaching in general. Since they are not physically present in class, students claim that there are technical problems (poor internet, camera off, interference …), the lack of verbal and non-verbal communication, and therefore insufficient activity in class, which are comments that we have expected. It could also be added that similar disadvantages were named in previous studies which examined the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching model.

Foreign language	Percentage (%)
German	49%
Italian	22%
Spanish	18%
Russian	8%
French	2%

Table 2 - Overview of respondents by foreign languages

Teaching a foreign language involves simultaneous working on developing all four language skills (listening, comprehension, speaking, and writing). One of the questions in the questionnaire was which language skill is the most difficult to develop during online teaching. Of the total number of respondents, 39% answered that the speaking skill is a language skill that is least acquired by this type of teaching; 32% of students consider it is the writing skill; 16% of them claim that the listening skill is the least developed skill, while 13% of the surveyed students chose comprehension as the weakest link. The conclusion is that online teaching inevitably slows down the development of speaking skills, as well as writing skills, which is expected, given that the physical presence of students in the classroom and direct contact and interaction with professors and colleagues (teamwork) is crucial in the development of these skills.

Language skill	Percentage (%)
Speaking	39%
Writing	32%
Listening	16%
Comprehension	13%

Table 3 - The language skill that is most difficult to develop during online teaching

When asked about the disadvantages of online teaching, 89 students answered that the main disadvantage is a technical issue (poor internet, computer problems, sound, camera ...), 80 of them claim that they lack live contact, while 77 respondents think they have poor concentration when attending classes online, that there is a distraction factor (family members, social networks, TV, noise ...), 55 respondents believe that the biggest disadvantage is limited feedback (feedback from teachers and colleagues), and 19 of them answered that the biggest

problem is that they do not have adequate opportunity to participate in this type of teaching.

Disadvantages of online learning	Percentage (%)
Technical issues (Internet, computer)	42%
Lack of direct interaction	37%
Poor concentration	36%
Limited feedback	26%
Active participation during classes	9%

Table 4 - The main disadvantages of online teaching

Based on the given results, it can be concluded that despite the advantages of Microsoft Teams (the availability of teaching material, video lectures, communication with teachers) certain disadvantages directly influence the learning process and the acquisition of language skills such as speaking and communication. However, there is no clear answer to the question why students still prefer online learning now that they have the opportunity to attend classes regularly.

4. CONCLUSION

Online teaching as a model of education that is organized with the help of modern technologies in the teaching process (presentation of content, exercises, feedback, assessment, and evaluation) proves to be a very practical form of education, as it allows teaching to be combined, synchronous and asynchronous. Students are enabled to attend classes in real-time, but also to access teaching materials from a remote location and at any time, using the selected learning platform (PowerPoint presentations, links to interactive content, video and audio content).

In this sense, hybrid teaching is a flexible and efficient approach to teaching that involves a combination of direct work in an educational institution and a distance learning system.

Since this is a newer teaching model, and bearing in mind that the opinions and attitudes of the protagonists in the teaching process are the most important parameters for considering the quality and efficiency of teaching and learning, this paper has presented a study conducted with students from different study programs at Singidunum University.

At Singidunum University, all courses, including foreign languages, are taught with the help of the Microsoft Teams Learning Management System (LMS system). Teaching materials, video recordings of lectures, presentations, video content, links to interactive materials, assignments, questionnaires, and announcements are available to students at any time and from any location.

However, in addition to all the advantages, this type of teaching also has disadvantages that students have identified and reported in this research. The majority of respondents stated that teamwork is the least represented, i.e. the lack of direct interaction with teachers and classmates. Since the research focuses primarily on foreign language teaching, the development of language skills in the online environment is one of the most important aspects presented to the respondents. Students who participated in the research recognize the greatest difficulties in developing communication skills and speaking skills, but also cite writing and comprehension skills as aspects where they have difficulties when it comes to distance language learning.

On the other hand, a significant number of students cited reduced concentration during distance learning due to the negative impact of a non-classroom environment (home atmosphere or other non-institutional location) as a disadvantage of this type of learning. What is also important is the fact that students cite technical issues as a disadvantage of combined teaching, i.e. the availability of adequate modern devices and fast internet. This disadvantage is stated by the largest percentage of students (almost half of the respondents). The smallest number of students named the inability to actively participate in classes as one of the disadvantages (9%).

As it can be concluded from these results, the disadvantages related to the online teaching process are objective and subjective, which should be taken into account and carefully considered to improve the existing circumstances to achieve an effective language learning process. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers in the field of application of digital tools in teaching and their pedagogically justified use. On the other hand, it is important to enable students to develop digital skills and digital literacy to reduce the disadvantages they have recognized and improve opportunities for more effective foreign language learning. In this context, the development of digital competencies of all participants in the teaching process is one of the prerequisites for effective foreign language teaching in the modern digital environment.

The affective factor should also not be forgotten, especially in foreign language teaching. In other words, what should also be considered crucial is the motivation of students to attend language classes either online or in a hybrid model. In other words, teachers should motivate students to join their language classes regardless of the learning model that they prefer. This motivation can be achieved by using numerous online applications, which is why foreign language teachers always need to be well-informed about new teaching materials and ICT sources.

5. REFERENCES

[1] Zavod za vrednovanje kvaliteta obrazovanja i vaspitanja, *Onlajn i hibridno ucenje- Dugorocna stremljenja i kratkorocne smernice*, 2021.

[2] A. Jakšić, K. Mitrović, J. Ćurčić, D. Gračanin, "Tradicionalna vs. Online nastava: prednosti i izazovi," in *Skup Trend 2021*, 2021.

[3] P. S. Sekeruš, B. V. Kovačević-Petrović "Onlajn-nastava romanskih književnosti i kultura u doba pandemije virusa korona," *Inovacije u nastavi-časopis za savremenu nastavu*, vol. 34 (4), pp. 137-154, 2021.

[4] T. Đurić, "Suvremeni informacijski i komunikacijski alati u provođenju nastave stranog jezika na daljinu," *Strani jezici 50*, pp. 235-266, 2021.

[5] M. Perak, Ž. Knok, "Njemački jezik u edukaciji studenata menadžmenta, turizma i sporta," in *Hrvatski znanstveni stručni skup o menadžmentu u turizmu i sportu*, 2010.

[6] M. Veljković Michos, V. Bošković Marković "Informaciono-komunikacione tehnologije u nastavi stranih jezika pre i tokom pandemije virusa COVID-19: pregled istraživanja na univerzitetskom nivou," *Anali Filološkog fakulteta*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 135-151, 2021.