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## QUALITATIVENESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING BY STUDENTS OF NON-PROFESSIONAL SPECIALTIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

*The article is devoted to the study of the quality of foreign language learning in the conditions of distance learning, as since March 2020 all universities have partially implemented distance and blended learning, and this has become a challenge not only for teachers but also for students. Emphasis is placed on the differentiation of the concepts of “distance education” and “distance learning”. The article identifies the need for a special approach of teachers to the choice of teaching aids in the process of learning a foreign language online, because the language, especially foreign, is, primarily, communication. The most effective means of information transmission in distance learning have been identified. Synchronous and asynchronous modes are distinguished through remote communication of participants in the educational process. The possibilities of using synchronous and asynchronous types of distance learning depending on the needs are briefly described. The survey, which was conducted among the students of all years of studying (excluding freshmen) at the Faculties of Economics and Law, revealed both the shortcomings and positive aspects of online learning. Students' answers have been analyzed and the readiness of all participants in the educational process for digital learning has been established. The emergence of problems with education, which some students faced during the two years of the pandemic, has been substantiated. The constant continuous exchange of information between the student and the teacher has been confirmed. We have conducted a comparison of traditional and distance learning methods and the most effective means of assessment and monitoring foreign language skills from the point of view of students. The improvement of foreign language skills has been found in 73% of surveyed students, especially in the aspects of “speaking” and “grammar”. The opinion of students on the effectiveness of exams and tests in the online format has been clarified, and it has been suggested to compare the options for conducting the final control online and offline. The necessity of further research of the organization of distance learning of foreign languages in case of continuation of quarantine restrictions has been proven.*

**Key words:** *distance learning, the study of foreign languages, online format, synchronous and asynchronous mode of learning, non-professional students.*

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## КВАЛІТАТИВНІСТЬ ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ СТУДЕНТАМИ НЕФАХОВИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ В УМОВАХ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОЇ ОСВІТИ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню якості вивчення іноземних мов в умовах дистанційного навчання, оскільки з березня 2020 року всі університети знаходяться частково на дистанційному та змішаному типах навчання, і це стало викликом не тільки для викладачів, але й для студентів. Акцентована увага на диференціації понять «дистанційна освіта» та «дистанційне навчання». У статті визначено потребу особливого підходу викладачів до вибору засобів навчання в процесі вивчення іноземної мови в режимі онлайн, оскільки мова, особливо іноземна, це перш за все – спілкування. Визначено найефективніші засоби передачі інформації при дистанційному навчанні. Засобами дистанційної комунікації учасників освітнього процесу виокремлено синхронний та асинхронний режими. Коротко схарактеризовано можливості використання синхронного та асинхронного видів дистанційного навчання в залежності від потреб. У ході опитування, яке проводилось серед студентів 2-6 курсів економічного та юридичного факультетів, виявлено як недоліки так і позитивні моменти онлайн навчання. Проаналізовано відповіді студентів і встановлено готовність усіх учасників навчального процесу до цифрового навчання. Обґрунтовано виникнення проблем з навчанням, з якими стикнулась частина студентів за два роки пандемії. Підтверджено постійний безперервний обмін інформацією між студентом і викладачем. Порівняно традиційний і дистанційний методи навчання та найефективніші засоби контролю знань іноземної мови з точки зору студентів. Встановлено покращення знань з іноземної мови у 73% опитуваних студентів, особливо в аспектах «говоріння» та «граматика». З'ясовано думку студентів щодо результативності складання іспитів та заліків в онлайн-форматі, а також запропоновано порівняти варіанти проведення підсумкового контролю в режимі онлайн та офлайн. Доведено необхідність подальших досліджень організації дистанційного навчання іноземних мов у разі продовження карантинних обмежень.

**Ключові слова:** дистанційне навчання, вивчення іноземних мов, онлайн-формат, синхронний та асинхронний режим навчання, студенти нефахових спеціальностей.

**Problem formulation.** The pandemic and lockdown have affected and changed not just our daily plans, but have also caused significant changes in the professional sphere, as well as in the education system. Since March 2020, all universities in Ukraine were on lockdown, which meant major changes in the usual educational process of students. The use of the Internet and learning platforms was not something completely new for students, but it was still a challenge, especially for foreign language learning, because it is believed that the language is best learned in live communication. These conditions forced all Ukrainian universities to organize

the process of online education with the use of innovative platforms in a relatively short period of time.

The forced transition to distance learning during the pandemic has also changed the way we learn foreign languages and encouraged teachers to constantly search for the most effective and efficient ways to learn. In the process of online learning, teachers have combined different forms of learning, used online simulators to better master lexical and grammatical material, had the opportunity to show photos and videos on the screen while communicating with the group, and conducted online testing.

However, for various reasons, students have not always been able to fully participate in online classes, complete assignments and tests on educational platforms. The main problem of distance learning was the impossibility of quality learning and, accordingly, evaluation of the studied material.

**Research analysis.** The process of organizing distance learning was studied by V. M. Kukharenko, O. V. Rybalko, I. H. Bloshchynskyi, Ye. S. Polat, R. V. Sharan and many other scientists. The research views of these scientists encourage us to distinguish between the concepts of distance education and distance learning. Thus, according to Kukharenko V. M. and Rybalko O. V., distance education is a specific organization of the educational process using distance, information, and telecommunication technologies (Kukharenko et al., 2002). Distance learning according to Khutorskyi A. V. is defined as a form of learning that is carried out by subjects of distance learning, and the process itself is provided by the use of telecommunications (Bloshchynskyi, 2014).

Problems of application of innovative technologies of distance learning of a foreign language were investigated by O. V. Oliinyk, I. Postolenko, L. A. Yevdokimova-Lysohor, S. S. Popadiuk. A. Kovalenko studied the specifics of using different forms, methods and techniques of distance learning, as well as the possibilities of using both traditional and innovative technologies of foreign language teaching at non-language faculties.

The teachers of H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University conducted an online survey among Ukrainian students and teachers of higher education institutions on problems with teaching and learning that have arisen during the coronavirus pandemic. The results gave the authors the opportunity to identify all the shortcomings of the sudden transition to distance learning. Poor internet connection, which limits the ability to join online classes, lack of direct communication and information exchange with classmates and fellow students, and there are students who have their own families and children, so they can not always participate in online lectures – all this has led to various learning problems. However, despite the large scope of research, they have not yet analyzed the results and quality of foreign language learning in the conditions of distance education.

**The aim of the article** is to investigate the process of studying at the university during the pandemic in general and the study of foreign languages by non-professional students, as well as how students are coping with digital learning. **The presentation of the main material.** As, temporarily, the opportunities for students to visit educational institutions are partially limited or absent, the Ministry of

Education and Science has approved a number of recommendations for remote communication of educational process participants by means of communication, both asynchronously and synchronously. If there is a need for simultaneous communication between many students and their teachers, as well as the ability to interact in real time, then video conferencing is used. The use of video conferencing allows students to communicate with the teacher in real time, using pre-prepared resources for learning. Synchronous distance learning involves interaction between learning process participants, who are in the online environment simultaneously. The means of transmitting information in this case are chats, webinars, audio and video conferencing, teleconferencing, live lectures, as well as various social networks such as Viber, Skype, Zoom, Google Meet. In asynchronous learning mode, all learning process participants interact with each other without being in the same web environment at the same time, and use e-mail, online testing, forums, blogs, social networks (Instagram, Facebook) and cloud services (Google Drive, Google form). Blended learning includes elements of both types of learning, both synchronous and asynchronous.

Our research deals with the problems and consequences of learning a foreign language in the context of distance learning. This article provides an overview of the results of a survey conducted in November-December 2021 among the students of all years of studying (excluding freshmen) at the Faculties of Economics and Law at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University who study English and German. The survey was conducted partly in writing online, and partly orally during the return to class in November 2021. Participation in the study was voluntary. The results of the written questionnaire and the oral questionnaire were not considered separately by language, as the percentage of students studying German is statistically insignificant. In this research, we have sought to find out what are problems and opportunities for online learning that the students have after two years of pandemic. We have paid special attention to whether the opinions and problems of second-year students, who have not yet fully attended classes in the classroom, differ from those who have already attended full-time classes at the university to the transition to online learning. We did not take into account first-year students, as they are not yet able to fully assess the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in higher education.

For our research, the responses of 932 students were analyzed, including 53% of girls and 47% of boys aged 18 to 22 years. 93% of respondents study

at the university to get a bachelor's degree, 7% to get a master's degree, among them 57% study at the Faculty of Economics, 43% at the Faculty of Law.

First of all, it was important for us to establish how well the students have managed to cope with the transition to digital learning. After all, the new conditions require each student to be responsible, self-organized, have will power, as well as strong motivation. The results of the first survey are presented in Table 1.

Despite the unexpected transition from the usual form of distance learning, the majority of students (60%) still said that they had managed to cope well with digital learning and forms used in online teaching. The vast majority of second-year students claimed absolute readiness for online learning. These results are also confirmed by the study "Digital Literacy of the Population of Ukraine" conducted by the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine. According to them, it is young people under the age of 20 who have the best digital skills, and received a share of 61.6% in the category "above average". Digital skills include the ability to communicate and solve problems on the Internet, as well as search for information and software. Law Faculty Students, compared to Economics Faculty Students, perceived the transition to digital learning much easier, this was confirmed by 70% of surveyed Law students. Quite a small percentage of respondents indicated difficulties in the process of transition to distance learning, but there is also a significant difference between the results of the survey of students of Economics and Law, 10% and 2%, respectively. According to Law students, working with computers and the Internet is familiar to them, as they have often been involved in drafting professional documents and finding the necessary information on the Internet during practical classes in main subjects.

The students generally felt the support of teachers and constant contact with them, in particular, with

foreign language teachers. Therefore, the results of the next survey, shown in Table 2, are quite expected.

These results indicate the continuity of the educational process, which, of course, involves a constant exchange of information between the student and the teacher. The answers "constantly" (64% of all students) and "almost constantly" (32% of all students) clearly show that the transition to distance learning did not have a negative impact on the educational process. This once again confirms the fact that the teachers, as well as the students, also managed to quickly adapt to the unusual format of digital learning and continued to work with the students without any problems. A small percentage of responses (4% of all students) indicating that there were students who only occasionally had contact with the teacher could not be considered as a significant indicator, as the reasons for the lack of regular contact are unknown. Moreover, in the survey process, many students pointed to problems with the Internet, difficulties with communication during online video conferencing (45%). Although a fairly large percentage of students (43%) said they did not see any problems in digital learning, some students still had difficulty completing assignments on the Moodle platform, which our school uses as a basis for distance learning. Among other shortcomings, students also pointed to the negative impact of computers on their health, as well as the lack of live communication, which is important and necessary for young people.

However, despite all the shortcomings, the question "How do you manage to study after two years of pandemic?" 76% of students say that studying is easy, fun, and accessible, effortless, because it has become more common than at the beginning of the pandemic. The majority of respondents (63.5%) are positive and expect to continue to gain new knowledge, find out interesting information and develop in the chosen field. 19.5% expect positive changes only in the traditional format of education.

Table 1

**How have you coped with digital learning?**

	<b>Economics faculty students</b>	<b>Law faculty students</b>	<b>All students</b>
well	53%	70%	60%
satisfactory	38%	28%	34%
had difficulties	9%	2%	6%

Table 2

**Have you had constant contact with your teacher?**

	<b>Economics faculty students</b>	<b>Law faculty students</b>	<b>All students</b>
constantly	61%	68%	64%
almost constantly	39%	23%	32%
occasionally	0%	9%	4%
quite rarely	0%	0%	0%

Comparing traditional and distance learning formats, it is safe to say that in the process of online learning there is an opportunity to use a variety of learning tools that are used in synchronous and asynchronous mode. Accordingly, we were interested in which tools the students will pay attention to in the process of online foreign language classes.

The vast majority of students pointed out that when teaching a foreign language online, teachers used both synchronous and asynchronous teaching aids. This once again demonstrates the ability of students to interact and communicate with the teacher and classmates in real time, as well as use resources and materials to improve their knowledge at any time convenient for the student.

The use of blended learning tools, in our opinion, is the most effective way to improve a foreign language, and also contributes to the intensification and control of the studied lexical and grammatical material.

Modern methods of teaching a foreign language using distance learning tools involve a largely independent work of the student, which the teacher can not always control. Therefore, changes in the level of language skills in distance learning depend only on the responsibility and self-control of the student.

After conducting a survey on self-assessment of the level of knowledge of a foreign language, we obtained unexpected results. 73% of students believe that their level of foreign language skills has significantly improved. Comparing the students of the two faculties, it should be noted that the vast majority of law students claim to have improved the

level of knowledge (85%) of a foreign language, which indicates a higher level of self-organization in matters of learning. A fairly large percentage of students of the Faculty of Economics who believe that their level of foreign language skills has not changed may be the result of the fact that students of the Faculty of Economics, according to Table 1, had significant difficulties with digital learning. Also, many students of the Faculty of Economics pointed out the many shortcomings of distance learning and expect positive changes from the traditional full-time form of education.

Analyzing the data in the previous table, we consider it appropriate to investigate which aspects of the language have improved or worsened, according to how students personally assessed the state of knowledge of a foreign language.

According to Table 5, more than half of all students (51%) who believe that their level of foreign language skills has improved, noted improvements in the aspect of "speaking" the most, the level of grammar increased in 28% of students, and equally (10.5%) improved understanding of listening and writing.

Although the percentage of students who noted a deterioration in their knowledge is very small, it is still worth determining which aspect, in the opinion of students, could have deteriorated. The highest percentage of students (41.5%) indicated a deterioration in grammar, 29% of students began to comprehend listening worse, speaking and writing deteriorated in 12.5% and 17% of students,

Table 3

### What teaching aids are used in the process of learning foreign languages in the context of distance learning?

	Economics faculty students	Law faculty students	All students
synchronous	6%	3%	4,8%
asynchronous	0,5%	0%	0,2%
blended	93,5%	97%	95 %

Table 4

### How has your knowledge of a foreign language changed during the distance learning process?

	Economics faculty students	Law faculty students	All students
improved	64%	85%	73%
worsened	7%	3%	5%
remained the same	29%	12%	22%

Table 5

### What aspects of foreign language learning have improved

	Knowledge improvement (73 % of all students)	Knowledge deterioration (5% of all students)
grammar	28%	41,5%
listening	10,5%	29%
speaking	51%	12,5%
writing	10,5%	17%

respectively. It is important to remember that the percentage was calculated from the number of students who, for some reason, believe that their knowledge in general or from a certain aspect has deteriorated. And such students are 5% of the total, so, in our opinion, these results should not be considered critical.

To check the effectiveness of learning by students, foreign language teachers need not only to communicate orally with students, but also to regularly monitor knowledge with the use of information and communication technologies. Monitoring of distance learning students can take the form of real-time testing, using email, the Moodle platform, forums or conferences. The most common forms of online assessment include: doing unit testing, writing quizzes, tests and essays, filling in tables, preparing projects and so on.

The results of the survey of students on the means of knowledge assessment and monitoring are shown in Table 6.

The obtained data clearly show us the tendency to use test tasks and oral interviews in the process of online assessment. Comparing the answers of students from the two faculties, we can also observe the unanimity of opinion on the use of tests and oral interviews to control knowledge. During real-time video conferencing with cameras on, teachers have ample opportunity to conduct an oral interview. Test tasks do not require simultaneous presence in one web environment, so they are convenient for both students and teachers. Extremely relevant for online assessment is the Moodle online learning system, which provides the ability to conduct online testing according to requirements and needs, such as final or exam control. Analyzing the answers received on the means of knowledge assessment and monitoring, we were also interested in the opinion of the students themselves on the most effective method of assessment. And it was quite unexpected that most

students find all methods effective, depending on which language aspect needs to be assessed.

Conducting final tests and exams in online format proved to be another difficult task for teachers. Taking into account all the possible risks and benefits of different types of final assessment, teachers selected the most optimal and alternative assessment options that would be generally open, flexible and could fully assess the learning outcomes. Of course, the results of the exams should not be considered completely “fair”, as the exam or test is held on any device that has access to the Internet, several browsers and additional digital tools that are beyond the control of the teacher. Currently, the most effective way to track whether a student has taken exams or tests on their own is through video surveillance, which is not always possible.

However, even though exams and tests were held in a more comfortable environment for the student, and taking tests or other tasks was less stressful than in the classroom, not all students were satisfied with the results of previous online end-of-semester exams. Table 7 shows the results of the survey on students’ satisfaction with their results in the end-of-semester exam.

The majority of students (61%) were able to do well at the exams, and this fact is quite expected given the above-mentioned circumstances under which the exams and tests took place, namely the opportunity to use someone else’s help or use additional digital tools. Students of the Faculty of Law managed to pass exams and tests with better grades than students of the Faculty of Economics, as shown in Table 7 (good – 64.5% and 60%, excellent – 29.5% and 25%, respectively). In the comments to the questionnaire, the students honestly admitted that in the offline format their results would most likely be worse. This conclusion was reached by the majority of senior students who already had experience in taking

Table 6

**How has knowledge assessment and monitoring been carried out?**

	Economics faculty students	Law faculty students	All students
unit tests	40%	42%	40%
tests with open-ended questions	22%	18%	19%
orally	38%	40%	41%

Table 7

**How well did you manage to pass the foreign language exam (test) online?**

	Economics faculty students	Law faculty students	All students
excellent	25%	29,5%	27%
good	60%	64,5%	61%
unsatisfactory	3%	2%	2%
would be better offline	12%	4%	10%

foreign language exams in the usual offline mode, so they could compare the conditions of online and offline assessment. 10% of all students believe that they would be able to take exams and tests and do better in the usual offline format than in the online format. This opinion was expressed mainly by second-year students, who are not yet able to compare the conditions for offline and online assessments, as the monitoring of their knowledge was carried out at 90% remotely.

**Conclusions.** The quality of education is an important factor influencing the economic development of society, and therefore employment and income, so adapting to quarantine conditions and the continuous functioning of the educational process are critical factors in society. Knowledge of foreign languages plays a vital role, because it not only keeps our brain in shape, but also is an important factor in the labor market when looking for a job. Students are given the opportunity in the process of studying at a higher education institution not only to acquire a certain profession, but also to improve their knowledge of foreign languages. Although not everyone is always ready to use this opportunity.

The analysis of our research has shown that, although the students were exposed to stress as a result of changing learning and teaching conditions, the overall picture of perception of the new realities of the educational process is still very positive. The students were able to easily adapt (94%) to digital learning, while having constant contact with the teachers, who in turn, using all possible learning tools, according to 95% of the students, provided a continuous learning process. Such efforts of the teachers contributed to the improvement of foreign language skills in 73% of the students. Types of control by the teachers were assessed by the majority of the students as effective, and, accordingly, contributed to the high effectiveness of the final assessment.

In general, the better the students managed to self-organize the learning process, the better they managed to cope with distance learning and successfully pass exams and tests.

The data obtained indicate the need and importance of further research on the results of distance learning of a foreign language, as the process of online learning continues, and no one can predict for sure what will be its consequences for foreign language learning.

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