
**Abstract**

**Introduction:** Modern reality gave human civilization a new challenge – the COVID-19 pandemic. Under these circumstances, distance learning has become the only opportunity to maintain an uninterrupted educational process. The authors share their experience of increasing productivity at foreign languages classes through applying their original techniques.

**Materials and methods:** In their research, the authors used the following theoretical, empirical and mathematical methods: studying the literary sources accumulated by the Russian and foreign scientific communities; observing; survey; interpreting statistical data; building graphs.

**Results:** Following the traditional guidelines in teaching a foreign language – comprehensive listening, speaking, reading, and writing – the authors tried to adjust the conventional methods to distance learning conditions. The aim was to reduce costs caused by the lack of face-to-face contact, and to enjoy the advantages of students’ continuous access to the Internet resources. Having analyzed their experience gained from April, 2020, to May, 2021, the authors came to the conclusion that the most tangible results had been gained through practicing such techniques as “chain retelling”, “mute listening”, “cross dialogue”, and “analytical review of modern scientific content”. While the former three helped to mostly sharpen students’ comprehensive listening and speaking skills at practical classes, the latter was of special value by teaching theoretical linguistic disciplines. Such original approach to working with scientific literature gives Bachelor students a favourable chance to use the information from the shared bank for conducting their further research at all university levels.

**Conclusions:** The proposed techniques have been tested in four leading Russian Universities, namely: Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Moscow City University, Moscow Financial and Industrial University “Synergy”. The aspects improved are reflected in the graph compiled based on the students’ survey results.

**Keywords:** Distance Learning, Bachelor Students, Foreign Language, Chain Retelling, Mute Listening, Cross Dialogue, Analytical Review.

**Introduction**

Modern reality is constantly giving human civilization more and more new challenges. One of these challenges is COVID-19 pandemic. It is sure to have influenced all spheres of human life: economic, political, cultural, the educational one not being an exception. But humans have always been very flexible and resilient. And it helped them to adapt their life to new conditions, and in this way to survive. Fortunately, information and...
communication technologies have always been of great help in drastic situation, and the situation with coronavirus demonstrated it to full extent. In all the chaos and confusion the virus brought, these technologies seem to have played a crucial role in maintaining a sense of normality and regular routine.

In order to prevent the coronavirus infection spread, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation recommended switching to distance learning. The term “distance learning” has not been fully established yet, but it is very relevant in the scientific literature. It would be logical to consider some Russian and foreign scientists’ visions of this educational phenomenon and try to shape our own understanding of it. Let us start with the domestic scientific community.

Almost all authors of the sources under analysis agree that the main principle of learning at a distance is that of interactivity (Grechushkina, 2018; Lutfullaev, Lutfullaev, Kobilova, & Nematov, 2020; Novoselova & Novoselov, 2020; Orusova, 2020; Poddubnaya, 2020; Tantsura, 2020; Tseryulnik, 2021; Umirova & Yuldasheva, 2021; Vodolad, Zaikovskaya, Kovaleva, & Savelyeva, 2010). But each of them emphasizes some special aspect of such interaction. For example, Vodolad (2010) stresses the idea that the interactive format should be aligned with “all the components inherent in the conventional educational process (goals, content, methods, organizational forms, learning tools)” while D.V. Novoselova and D.V. Novoselov (2020) pay special attention to “collaboration of a student and a teacher”. Some researchers consider modeling to be the greatest opportunity of interactivity (Umirova & Yuldasheva, 2021), the others being concerned about the dual manifestation of this phenomenon: synchronous (in real time, for example, using video conferencing programs) and asynchronous (with some delay in time, when tasks are uploaded to the network and the deadlines for completing the tasks are fixed) (Grechushkina, 2018; Tseryulnik, 2021). In this paper we will mostly deal with the synchronous mode as it seems to us more challenging.

One more characteristic of distance learning that does not cause the scientists’ objections is using some technical means as a mediator between a teacher and a student. It is them that provide interactivity and form specific information and telecommunications infrastructure for transmitting information (Grechushkina, 2018; Vodolad et al., 2010). It is hard to argue this point and we, following Poddubnaya, tend to think that multimedia tools, when used adequately, contribute “to a greater extent, to development students’ independent learning skills” (Poddubnaya, 2020). Having this in view, we tried to rely on our students’ specific level of technical literacy that could provide them the necessary degree of independency in carrying out our tasks.

Stressing the importance of independent learning it would be appropriate to ask the question about a teacher’s role in distance education. In this point we absolutely agree with Tantsura (2020) who believes that “individualization involves a constant collaboration of a student and a teacher”. It is hardly possible for a student, especially at a Bachelor level, to smoothly pass along the curriculum stages without their teacher’s instructions. Only a teacher, equipped with theoretical guidelines that have been supported with practical experience can “adjust the educational trajectory to the needs of each individual student” (Orusova, 2020). Does it mean that, under distance learning conditions, a teacher becomes only a “moderator” of a pedagogical process? In this point it would be reasonable to rely on the view of the group of authors from Samarkand State Medical Institute, who state that such organization of a teaching learning process can primarily give teachers the possibility “to express themselves in transferring their experience to an infinite number of students” (Lutfullaev et al., 2020). A teacher’s awareness of this possibility will give them an additional stimulus for enlarging the scope of their professional knowledge and tailoring their methods of teaching to students’ demands in order to be realized both as a professional and a personality.

Foreign scientists are persistently touching upon this problem as well. There could be find some intersections of their views with those articulated by their Russian colleagues, especially in the following issues: a student and a teacher’s physical separation; effective application of combining different technologies (including correspondence, audio, video, computer, and the Internet); students’ working in compliance with an individual educational trajectory (Dhawan, 2020; Kentnor, 2015; Mizza & Rubio, 2020; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021; Sampson, 2003).

It is interesting to note that Sampson, underlining the specific mode of delivery at distance learning as its main feature, focuses his attention on “independent learning through the means of self-study texts and non-contiguous communication” (Sampson, 2003). As far as we can see from his research, he interprets “non-contiguous” as the core term in the distance education concept. This on-going communication, in our opinion, imposes a special responsibility on a teacher, making them
develop such qualities as sagacity, open-mindedness and flexibility.

Dhawan (2020) justifiably argues that distance learning implies "the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means" In this approach we can see correlations with the Russian scientists' concern about students' individual trajectory. Judging from our own experience, this statement makes more sense by exercising an asynchronous mode, while involving students in any activity in a practical class, a teacher has to set the rhythm by themselves (certainly taking into consideration their students' abilities, knowledge level, task complexity and many other factors).

As for a teacher’s role, among the opportunities and challenges, the foreign researchers see optimizing online resources and materials, increasing learner engagement, reaching teacher and student mutual satisfaction, their close connectedness, and a teacher’s professional development (Kentnor, 2015; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). We completely agree with these points, and it was reaching teacher and student’s mutual satisfaction that became the starting point for our research. We are convinced that though the distance learning process is a bi-lateral one, only a teacher’s active, constructive and creative work is the key to success in any educational format, be it a conventional or innovative one.

In the end we would like to highlight one more idea found in the sources under discussion: a distance mode is sure to be more effective in combination with a face-to-face one ("blended learning courses") (Mizza & Rubio, 2020). Today, when the pandemic situation in Russia is somewhat loosened thanks to active vaccination, and Universities have an opportunity to alternate these types of learning, finding effective ways of their seamless blending becomes one of the most relevant topics for the educational community.

Having summarized the above-given views, arguments and opinions, we drew some conclusions that helped us analyze the peculiarities of teaching foreign languages under distance learning conditions and find some original ways of organizing this process to get most out of it. The conclusions are as follows:

- In distance learning there still exist two actors of the educational process: a teacher and a student;
- In the process of transferring knowledge, they are physically separated;
- A greater emphasis is put on a student's role in the process;
- To be a full participant of the process a student must be able to act independently;
- The actors’ interaction is technically mediated;
- A mediator in this case is a computer (or any other gadget having an access to the Internet);
- This mediated process must be carefully planned and organized by a teacher;
- To make the process effective, a teacher must be aware of distance learning peculiarities and be capable of applying both traditional and innovative methodical techniques.

As most phenomena, especially those dealing with human mind and spirit, distance learning has both its proponents and opponents. Admitting its effect as the key factor in changing the traditional educational paradigm, the opponents mark the following distinctive features as negative ones:

- Decrease in students’ motivation to study;
- Students’ inability to maintain self-discipline and diligence;
- Increase of a teacher’s burden;
- Emotional breakdowns, both among students and teachers;
- Teachers’ inability to adequately control the knowledge level;
- Restrictions on the remote knowledge transfer;
- Formalization of the educational process;
- Penchant for template solutions (Kazantsev, Mazurov, & Pimanov, 2021).

But those who tend to see the benefits of the process underline the following aspects. By saying “a computer cannot replace a teacher”, reality is falsified, since a computer does not replace anyone. Its main role is to facilitate a teaching-learning process, to connect a teacher and a student. It is not responsible for a teacher’s skills, because it is not able to either magnify it or reset them. Meaningful interaction, heuristic communication can also be carried out using a digital device. (Schneider, 2020).

Stressing the heuristic nature of communication by distance learning, Schneider recognizes the fact that the practical methods being developed by teachers now are not guaranteed to be optimal, perfect, or rational, but they are nevertheless sufficient for reaching an immediate, short-term goal or approximation. Using such methods may be considered quite satisfactory at this stage, because in the long run they speed up the process of finding optimal solutions. Actually, this is the point in which the practical value of this paper could be undoubtedly seen.

While for a teacher, as it has been stated before, the strength of online courses is the
possibility of self-expression and transferring their experience to an infinite number of students, for students it is “the availability of education, the opportunity to improve their skills, to acquire new contacts for cooperation in the future” (Shamsiev, Kurbaniyazov, & Davlatov, 2018). The idea of acquiring new contacts seems especially valuable in this context as in our digital era, with its limitless technical perspectives, young people enjoy a great number of opportunities to network in the process of solving their academic problems. They find co-thinkers not only among their groupmates sitting in the same classroom, but among all those who are interested in similar issues and work in the same field on a global scale. They have an access to countless electronic sources of professional literature that can help them create a bank of information necessary for their future special purposes.

Among other advantages of distance learning for students, the most popular ones mentioned by the foreign authors are: the ability to combine study and work, the implementation of the learning process with the maximum use of modern information technologies, the ability not to depend on the location of the university and at the same time master the training course at a convenient time (Yashina, 2019). Undoubtedly, there is something in what each side says. With this in view, the pedagogical scientists’ mission is to find the ways how to strengthen the benefits of the process and how to reduce its costs and negative implications.

Teaching foreign languages has always been one of the most challenging pedagogical areas, even under normal conditions. As a result of pandemic hazard and distance learning introduction and spread, there recently have appeared a lot of research whose aim is to facilitate the process of foreign language teaching at all educational levels. Let us consider some views that, to our mind, shape the overarching idea of this process today and open some prospects for a teacher’s creative initiative.

First of all, modern scientists stress the necessity of considering foreign languages teaching in a distance format as an element of the whole educational system that does not contradict the conceptual directions of its didactic organization (Badalova, 2020; Botturi, Kapler, & Negrini, 2018; Kameneva, 2015; Kodzova, Aslanova, Chitao, & Alentyeva, 2021; Lvova, 2011; Pawlak & Kiermasz, 2018). On the other hand, telecommunications and multimedia tools used as a technological basis for teaching dictate their own peculiarities that cannot be ignored (Lvova, 2011). It is important not to see something malicious in technical means but turn them to our advantage based on the specifics of the discipline taught. One of the aims that is difficult to be reached in traditional full-time training is to hone students’ speech practice. And interactive classes with the involvement of authentic sources can effectively increase the volume of such practice. Using the capabilities of Internet services, attracting native speakers and organizing communication with them, it is possible “to solve the problem of increasing the density of communication in a foreign language in the educational process in the modern information and educational environment” (Kameneva, 2015). Getting information from such authentic sources as electronic reference books, dictionaries widens the learners’ outlook and helps to choose the correct variants of lexical units in case of polysemy and stylistic ambiguity (Badalova, 2020).

A free access to a huge amount of authentic information in the Internet may contribute not only to enriching lexicon, but also to “giving considerable weight to the mastery of pronunciation features and the command of a range of sometimes very complex grammatical structures” (Pawlak & Kiermasz, 2018). In such a way, all aspects of the language are drilled simultaneously and, what is more important, in accordance with native speakers’ patterns.

Acquiring communicative competence, that is a top priority in teaching foreign languages, is impossible without expanding students’ background knowledge about the history and culture of foreign countries (Kodzova et al., 2021). The Swiss researchers Botturi, Kapler and Negrini justly view the Internet as “an effective tool for supporting the development of cultural awareness and of intercultural competences”. In their opinion, intercultural learning and awareness are enhanced as “computer-mediated communication provides an opportunity to actually meet other cultures and develop a denser concept of ‘the other’” (Botturi et al., 2018).

Generalizing the viewpoints from the above cited and the other relevant sources, we may conclude that for a foreign language teacher, the strength of distance education is the ability to implement the functions of delivering general and detailed instructions, giving tasks for independent work in a certain format, monitoring knowledge in the form of electronic tests, and interacting with students in the mode of text, file, audio and video exchange. In our opinion, the distance learning form can be considered as fruitful, since information and communication technologies make it possible to simultaneously transmit video, sound, slide and graphic language material, which contributes to the effective teacher-student interaction in an online mode.

Investigating this problem, we should also bear in mind the following specific features of the
subject “Foreign Language”: the subject matter in this case is not the basics of some science, but communication on any topics that correspond to students' major, age and interests. The purpose of teaching a foreign language is developing skills that create students' communicative competence. The exception is linguistic concepts and knowledge about the language system necessary for the language functioning as a means of communication. Thus, a foreign language acts both as a goal and as a means of teaching.

Speaking in detail about linguistic skills that are necessary for communicative competence acquisition, we should take into consideration the level of education. In this article we will deal with teaching foreign languages to Bachelor students at a university level. Our aim is to analyze how a teacher of foreign languages can organize a teaching-learning process with their students via modern communication technologies, gaining even more effectiveness through applying the authors’ original methods.

Thus, the object of our research is organizing the process of teaching foreign languages at a Bachelor level and its subject is revealing the peculiarities of this process under distance learning conditions. The topicality of the research is proved by the above-mentioned pandemic circumstances forcing the distant format as the top educational priority in the modern society on a global scale.

The novelty of the research can be seen in the fact that the authors, having a rich experience in teaching foreign languages (English, German, French), managed to find out new opportunities in distant form of education and use them for their students’ benefit in all aspects (comprehensive listening, speaking, reading and writing). Enjoying the advantages of the students’ continuous access to the Internet resources, they introduced three new techniques for developing students’ comprehensive listening and speaking skills (“chain retelling”, “mute listening”, “cross dialogue”), as well as the original approach to working with scientific literature (“analytical review of modern scientific content”) that were successfully applied in groups of both linguistic and non-linguistic students.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of our research rests upon the views of the following scientists: D. Krystal, K.A. Meyer, E.I. Passov, A.A. Leontyev, R.P. Milrud, E.S. Polat. Let us have a closer look at their main ideas.

David Crystal in his classical book “Language and the Internet” (first published in 2001) predicted “an unprecedented array of opportunities” provided by the Web to both students and teachers. One of the benefits was seen in putting learners in contact with “up-to-date information about a language, especially through the use of online dictionaries, usage guides, and suchlike”. No doubt, Web sites can provide a greater variety of materials, “attractively packaged”, such as newspaper articles, quizzes, exercises, self-assessment tasks, and other forms. And all this is a solid basis for practicing “both individual and collaborative work”. At the same time, Crystal (2002) foresaw the pedagogical problem of “evaluating and grading what is available, so that students are not overwhelmed” and supposed that the Internet in foreign-language teaching would “present teachers with fresh challenges”.

In Katrina Meyer’s papers we have come across the valuable idea about learners’ being “the main beneficiaries of every type of education including e-learning”. The quality of e-learning courses is a complex and multi-dimensional topic, and due to the differences of this type of teaching from traditional face-to-face education, the quality of these courses should be evaluated using specific and standard criteria (Meyer, 2002).

For E.I. Passov the methodological system of intensive training in foreign languages, functioning with the help of technical training devices and automated systems, was of particular interest. He believed that introducing such system would help to reach the goal of mastering a foreign culture in the most effective and rational way. And he was sure that the communicative approach would contribute to it greatly (Passov, 1985).

A.A. Leontyev recommended to offer a team of students some shared activity which would be interesting for all of them and, at the same time, would be of unquestionable personal value. The functions should be distributed in accordance with students’ individual traits, but the shared goal should rally the team and contribute to the development of healthy interpersonal relations (Leontiev, 1991).

R.P. Milrud was an advocate of humanistic approach to learning. He searched for the ways of creating equal opportunities for everyone in class, paying special attention to social construction of knowledge, students’ individual characteristics, cognitive motivation, and teaching styles and strategies (Milrud, 2020).

E.S. Polat wrote much about cooperative learning. Actually, she thought it to be the core concept in humanistic psychology and pedagogy (Mirolyubov, 2010).

We have chosen the above-mentioned approaches as the basis for our research because their authors’ touch upon the problems lying within the scope of our own scientific
Effective Techniques of Teaching Foreign Languages to Bachelor Students under Distance Learning Conditions, 320

Interests prompted us to write the presented article:
- Peculiarities of computer-mediated communication;
- Distinctive features of the Internet discourse;
- Different approaches to teaching foreign languages;
- The integrity of comprehensive listening, speaking, reading and writing in mastering a foreign language;
- Distance learning as a promising trend in pedagogy;
- Novelty as the driving force of the educational area.

In the process of our investigation, we collaborated with four leading Russian Universities, namely: Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Moscow City University, Moscow Financial and Industrial University “Synergy”. It should be noted that we tested our approaches in both linguistic and non-linguistic Bachelor students’ groups studying such disciplines as The English Language; The German Language; The French Language; Business English; Business German; English for Special Purposes; German for Special Purposes; Communication Theory; Introduction to Linguistics; Theory and Practice of Translation. The total number of students who were engaged in the practical part of the research accounts for 246 people.

To reach our research goals we applied the following theoretical, empirical and mathematical methods:
- Studying the literary sources accumulated by the Russian and foreign scientific communities, paying special attention to more recent papers available in an open access (analyzing, summarizing, making notes, citing, compiling a bibliography);
- Observing;
- Survey, conversation, questionnaire;
- Studying different class/home activities products;
- Interpreting statistical data;
- Building graphs. Selecting and varying these methods adequately helped the authors conduct multi-aspect research, register rough interim results and ultimately draw some tangible conclusions that are believed to have contributed to the modern pedagogical practice.

Research Results

As we have already mentioned, mastering a foreign language is exercised through four interconnected and equally important directions: comprehensive listening, speaking, reading and writing. Let us see what new elements could be introduced in training each of them under distance learning conditions.

The concept of “comprehensive listening” implies the idea of perceiving and understanding speech by ear. It is used in any oral communication, since this action is a part of oral communicative activity. Training comprehensive listening of foreign texts has a positive impact on the development of students’ auditory memory and their ability to catch, accumulate and then successfully use the perceived data for their everyday and professional purposes.

Working with Bachelor students we should remember that they belong to the so-called “digital generation” that has some peculiar features in data assimilation. So, to be a success in teaching comprehensive listening we should bear in mind the following guidelines:
- If possible, present the text only once;
- Shorten the list of unknown words to minimum;
- Do not prohibit your students to use their smartphones and other gadgets;
- Rely mostly on the extracts from real (not academic) sources;
- Select texts with live youth language;
- Listen to non-native speakers from different parts of the globe;
- Vary the duration range of the texts;
- Switch your students’ attention to different topics;
- Encourage students to listen texts on their professional topics;
- Be consistent: practise comprehensive listening at every lesson;
- Be tactful, flexible, patient and understanding (Borisova & Balabas, 2020).

All these recommendations do work in practice and contribute greatly to increasing students’ interest and enthusiasm. But the fact of a teacher and their students’ separation in space under distance learning conditions sometimes makes it difficult to check understanding of the presented text. It would be effective here to apply the so-called “chain retelling”: one by one, students retell the whole text from beginning to end. It is allowed to repeat the same sentence but only if the next student enlarges the content of the previous version with more details (or paraphrases it using more lexical units and grammatical structures caught from the audio file).

It is not recommended to retell one and the same text two or more times. It is much better to listen to another text and to repeat the same procedure with it. As our experience has shown, such mode does not give students any chance to
distract their attention. They feel deeply involved in the process and have to be fully concentrated on the task. It is more reasonable to select texts on the same topic to crown the listening practice with making a generalizing summary of all the texts they have heard (again through “chain retelling”).

Another tip here is to use the so-called “mute listening”. In this case, it is not a teacher who plays the audio file aloud. Under distance learning conditions, it is no problem to send the students a link to a certain text and fix them a time limit (we usually made it twice longer than the given audio file lasted). The task is to say as many sentences as possible on the text content. A student can use the time at their discretion (listen to the full text twice, listen to the text once and then re-listen to some difficult fragment, listen to the whole text and then make some notes, etc.). When the time is up, a teacher starts with asking those students who prepared the fewest sentences. So, weaker students will have an opportunity to give the gist of the text, while better ones, who will take the floor later, will enrich the retelling with more details and express the same idea with more vivid vocabulary and complex grammar.

We have been practicing “chain retelling” and “mute listening” regularly with non-linguistic students at the lessons of English, German, French, Business English, Business German, English for Special Purposes and German for Special Purposes since April, 2020. The results obtained in May 2021 can be seen in the following diagram that was compiled on the students’ survey (127 respondents). We asked students, “How did the techniques applied for comprehensive listening help you in studying the foreign language?” There were some answers offered (the students were allowed to mark several choices), the most popular turned out to be:

![Diagram showing the results of “chain retelling” and “mute listening” application]

**Figure 1.**
**The results of “chain retelling” and “mute listening” application**

Now let us move on to the equally important aspect – speaking. Oral speech is a form of linguistic activity that includes both understanding somebody else’s message and producing your own response (monologic and dialogic utterances). That is why it is closely connected with comprehensive listening. In the process of teaching oral speech, a special difficulty arises due to the fact that a student needs to master and use the language material as a means of communication, and not only for recognition and identification. In addition to knowing the syntactic and morphological structure, a student should be able to use a complex system of sentence construction, which sometimes does not coincide with the rules for constructing sentences in their native language.

In the process of teaching a foreign language under distance learning conditions, we paid special attention to a dialogic form of communication. It is due to the fact that this form is especially difficult to be organized in a computer-mediated learning. To facilitate the process, we used the so-called “cross dialogue” method. For this purpose, we gave our students a definite topic and asked each student to make up their own dialogue, the time limit being fixed and the number of replies being restricted. After that, we appointed two students to speak on the topic using their prepared variants. It was certainly impossible to strictly follow the students’ templates, and they had to adjust their questions and answers to their partners and devise something on the spot. Nevertheless, they tried to rely on the prepared scope and in most cases, exactly because of that, were a success.

Thus, the “cross dialogue” technique helped students to develop both comprehensive listening skills and the ability to adequately respond to some unexpected linguistic
Effective Techniques of Teaching Foreign Languages to Bachelor Students under Distance Learning Conditions, 322

challenges. This method helped us to train both a well-prepared and spontaneous speech. The students felt less anxious because of having some draft in front of their eyes, at the same time they were not glued to the text and had a chance for improvisation.

The third aspect in mastering a foreign language is reading. Teaching this aspect online can and should be as effective as in the classroom. This skill is developed in combination with other productive skills: speaking and writing. A distinctive feature of reading online is the availability of numerous digital sources, including not only textbooks but also different websites providing most updated and urgent information. Students can download the necessary texts, articles, audio and video files and share them with their teacher and groupmates (practically all platforms, such as Zoom, MS Teams or Skype, have a screen sharing function).

Alternatively, a teacher or a student can take screenshots of some important pages and send them to a chat, providing a digital, paperless, environmentally friendly document for reading. All this gives a teacher a favorable opportunity to develop students' reading skills using authentic texts. In this case a special emphasis should be put on the cognitive and professional value of the text, its compliance with the students' major, age and interests.

In this article we will focus our special attention on academic reading. It proved to be especially urgent in linguistic groups studying such disciplines as Communication Theory, Introduction to Linguistics, Theory and Practice of Translation. In the educational process we used the “analytical review of modern scientific content” method.

At the lesson, we asked students to browse the sites of different scientific journals and find an article on the topic under discussion. They were allowed to select articles both in Russian and in English. For their convenience we recommended them to start with the sites of their universities and to study the materials from the following journals: “Vestnik MGPU” and “Vestnik REU”. There were also some other journals recommended, such as “Perspectives of Science and Education”, “Philological Sciences”, “Litera” and the like. We delegated more initiative to more advanced students and advised the site https://www.scimagojr.com to enjoy a wide range of high-quality scientific papers (in an open access). Here students could use different filters, such as subject area, subject category, region/country, publication type, year, language, etc.

So, the first stage was to visit the recommended site and to choose the proper article. At the second stage the students were asked to present the brief analysis of the article content (in a foreign language), sharing the exact information about its author and providing the correct reference to the article. All the students of the group presented their relevant articles, and in this way by the end of the lesson, each student had a general picture of research on the topic and a bibliography consisting of 12-15 references. That could be seen a basis for conducting their further research, writing their own articles, and later, course and graduation papers.

Such approach saved students a lot of time and effort. They learned how to collaborate and work for mutual benefit. They also got a good chance to quote the presented articles because they had a correctly arranged reference to each of them. If we had enough time we gave our students some additional tasks, for example to present all the references in compliance with APA (American Psychological Association) style that is considered to be preferable in serious journals, cited in such bases as SCOPUS and Web of Science. (In Moscow City University, The Department of Foreign Philology plans to include in the curriculum a new discipline “Quote Culture vs Meme Culture”, where students will be taught how to cite scientific literature correctly.)

The essence of the method described can be presented schematically with the following sequence of steps:

Figure 2.

Analytical review of modern scientific content

The last but not least component in teaching foreign languages is writing. Writing skills are also a top priority in students’ socialization and professional adaptation. The
improvement of written speech competence contributes to the development of logical thinking, sharpens students’ literacy and their ability to generalize and summarize the material, encourages them to improve their spelling and grammar skills. And this is for good reason. Written speech involves message transmission with the intention of getting a response. If a piece of writing is effective, it conveys a message in such a way that it affects the audience as the writer intends. Any piece of writing is an attempt to communicate something, that is why a writer has to shape a goal in mind, to establish and maintain contact with a reader, to organize the material through the use of certain logical and grammatical devices.

“Oral-written speech” of the Internet communicants has recently become an issue of great concern (Borisova, 2018). Scientists are interested in the influence of this type of communication on all aspects of social functioning and development. Linguists, first of all, are concerned about the processes associated with one of the most noticeable consequences of this revolutionary technology – the blurring of the borderline between oral and written speech. On the one hand, the messages of Internet communicants have the distinctive features of oral speech – spontaneity and linear nature. On the other hand, this method of interaction remains written. So, digital students today use a kind of mixture of written literary and oral colloquial language. And sometimes it hinders their communication with teachers: it is obviously difficult for them to express their ideas without using abbreviations, emoticons, erratic constructions and other conventional means of Internet communication. But teachers demand that they should use full sentences, correct grammatical constructions and traditional spelling variants.

All these problems are reflected in students’ messages in academic chats. That is why under distance learning conditions writing skills gained even more importance. It is not a secret that very often we face some technical problems while conducting our classes through computer equipment, for example sound interruptions. In case of such malfunctioning, we have to establish a written contact with our interlocuters. And we believe that it is a good idea to force our students to write correctly and even give them lower marks for their answers when they make a lot of mistakes. Certainly, it must not be the case, but we should not indulge students’ inaccuracy and ignorance.

Discussion

Analyzing the results obtained in the course of their research, the authors admit that they have rather evolutionary than revolutionary nature. They do not reveal any glaring discrepancy with the theoretical conclusions presented in the introductory chapter of the article.

Working with our students we realized that they should be to a greater extent “partially independent” and encouraged them to use multimedia tools, as Poddubnaya (2020) recommends. We also depended heavily on D.V. Novoselova and D.V. Novoselov’s argument that the fundamental principle giving tangible results by distance learning was the principle of interactive collaboration of a student and a teacher (Novoselova & Novoselov, 2020). We did not either challenge Orusova’s statement about the educational trajectory for each individual student (Orusova, 2020). It was hardly possible to question the necessity to optimize online resources and materials, learner engagement, teacher and student satisfaction and connectedness, stressed by Russell and Murphy-Judy (2021).

Our main task was to elucidate all these theoretical postulates in practical terms. We hope that we managed to provide a solid illustration of how to overcome students’ inability to maintain self-discipline and diligence and their decreased motivation (Mizza & Rubio, 2020) through our techniques of “chain retelling”, “mute listening” and “cross dialogue”. Taking these original approaches shed new light on the routine procedures of listening and speaking and proved the validity of Leontiev’s “shared activity” principle (Leontiev, 1991). Moreover, it demonstrated Milrud’s “humanistic approach” to learning, focusing on students’ individual characteristics and cognitive motivation (Milrud, 2020).

We avoided formalization of the educational process and found the possibility of our “self-expression” as teachers (Schneider, 2020). Bearing in mind Schneider’s remark that “a computer does not replace anyone and its main role is to facilitate a teaching-learning process” (Schneider, 2020), we tested our “analytical review of modern scientific content” method that provided a solid illustration of how useful a continuous access to the Internet could be. Our students’ working with scientific articles increased their “density of communication in a foreign language” as Kameneva (2015) predicted, “enriched their lexicon” and consolidated “the command of complex grammatical structures” as Pawlak and Kiermasz (2018) stated. Creating a shared bank of articles for students’ further research was aligned with
Polat’s “cooperative learning” (Mirolyubov, 2010).

To sum it up, we would like to stress that we still see Crustal’s “unprecedented array of opportunities” in distance learning (Crystal, 2002) and hope to broaden the scope of research in this field with our further experiments.

Conclusion

Having applied the proper theoretical, empirical and mathematical methods, the authors reached their research goal: they analyzed how to organize a process of teaching foreign languages to Bachelor students via modern communication technologies and how to make it even more effective by applying their newly-introduced original methods.

The collaboration with four leading Russian Universities (Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Moscow City University, Moscow Financial and Industrial University “Synergy”) testifies to the fact that the proposed techniques could be valid for both linguistic and non-linguistic students. The total number of students in the groups (246 people) also proves the idea of the proposed techniques being quite universal and acceptable for various students’ settings.

The authors tested their method while teaching such disciplines as The English Language; The German Language; The French Language; Business English/German; English/German for Special Purposes; Communication Theory; Introduction to Linguistics; Theory and Practice of Translation. And that leads us to believe that in perspective such innovations could be introduced in teaching the other theoretical and practical subjects.

References


