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Distance Teaching and Learning English through Online Platforms

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Abstract

Distance education has been sustaining English learning when teachers and learners are unable to meet in the classroom physically. However, it cannot be surmised that distance education alone will be able to help learners in English language learning. This article explores the effectiveness of connected activities, appropriate teaching resources, interaction, feedback and assessment as being the key ways in which distance English teaching can be effectively organized. The article discusses listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and integrated language skills that can be developed through practical examples. The article also focuses on online platforms that can enable the achievement of language learning objectives and desired participation pathways for learners of varying needs.

Keywords: distance education, online platforms, English language learning, digital access, interaction, COVID-19

Introduction

Distance teaching and learning is a method of teaching and learning in which the teacher and learners are physically apart. Learning consists of accessing materials and engaging in tasks or activities with support, when necessary, while teaching consists of preparation, explanation, guiding activities, and the provision of feedback. Media for communication include printed mail, radio, television, email and the Internet. UNESCO (n.d.) states that distance education is teaching at a distance by using communication technologies and other media. So, distance education is a group of learning modalities, including online education.

Online platforms facilitate distance learning using the internet, through communication and learning. At times, instruction can be synchronous (teacher/student interaction happens at the same time), and at other times it can be asynchronous (time-shifted instruction, in which learners can access materials and activities at a later time). These can be mixed with live lectures and discussions, recorded lessons, digital readings, online activities, etc., depending on the course objectives. Bates (2019) stresses the need for adapting teaching methods and technologies to learners' needs and desired learning goals. Teaching in this manner makes instructional planning a key basis of distance teaching.

The importance of language practice and interaction in English language instruction for online teaching should be fully considered. For example, teachers can develop tasks which consist of reading tasks, writing tasks (which offer discussions and/or listening activities and responses),

and questions. Utilizing digital tools does not automatically result in meaningful participation, though. Hampel and Stickler (2005) describe language teachers' technical skills, community-building skills, and language teaching skills as the three components required to be a successful online language teacher. They see the role of the teacher in providing a context for the learner to communicate, interact and feel confident in the language in their framework.

With regard to distance teaching and learning of English, this relationship between technology, didactics and learners has to be well-planned. It asks teachers to create classroom materials that are suitable to the context, establish clear expectations and provide chances for communication and feedback. Course design and continuing communication online play an integral part in this method (Bates, 2019). The use of online tools as tools for learning, participation and interaction hence demands a focus on usage of these online tools as learning support.

Understanding Distance English Teaching

In the process of teaching online, the internet is one such means to help us overcome that barrier to learning and communication. However, there is also contact through mobile phones, printed teaching material and downloaded teaching material, in distance and blended learning. These options come into play if students are unable to remain connected throughout. Then, we must understand the educational arrangement, and the various types of technology for supporting the arrangement. A particular application is a way of helping people to implement and organize learning and not an application itself.

Singh and Thurman (2019) examined different definitions of online learning and emphasized the importance of clarifying the definition. There is one rule that is useful for practical English teaching, namely, the organization of the synchronous activity and the asynchronous activity. Synchronous activity occurs at the same time in real time, e.g., a live discussion. With asynchronous activity, the activity is completed at a later time, for example, responding to a forum post, and submitting a recording. The arrangements are different with various requirements. Students should be aware of activities that need to be carried out together and those that can be done during a predetermined time frame.

A live lesson can allow for answers to questions, instant clarification and spontaneous discussion. But it might be hard for students with poor connectivity or those who share devices. An asynchronous task gives time for additional listening, preparation of a response and study of feedback. It may isolate learners, however, if there is no answer to the question. The problem is not picking arrangements for each activity. It is up to the teacher to determine how these arrangements can work together and what support may be needed when the preferred mode of learning is inaccessible for the learner.

The concept of planned online language education versus crisis prompts for language education is discussed in Gacs et al. (2020). They view planning, implementation and evaluation as integral tasks. If applied to the way English is taught, it can help the teacher start from the desirable language performance and reverse engineer to suitable activities. When students are called on to explain a given process, they need a model, appropriate language, practice in speaking it, and feedback. A grammar presentation can be uploaded to support some of that work, but it is not a substitute for the actual communication activity.

In all of these arrangements, the teacher's presence will continue to be of importance. Rapanta et al. (2020) place great importance on the learning activity and the presence of the teacher

in online university education. In practice, this presence involves explicit directions, pertinent questions, responses to problems, and feedback. It does not demand that the teacher be available 24/7. An organized time frame and a defined communication channel can be more sustainable than having to hope to receive replies at all times of the day. Students need to be aware of when and how to seek help.

These are adaptations to a teacher education course adapted to an online format during the pandemic as described by Moorhouse (2020). This is an educational example and should not be interpreted as being indicative of the same results or outcomes being experienced in every setting. The significance is the need to modify the teaching and not simply to move it online. On a more general level, Erarslan (2021) reviews the studies of English teaching and learning conducted during the first year of the pandemic. As a whole, these publications contribute to decisions about online English teaching as a design, participation, and context of education, instead of technology adoption.

Selecting Platforms and Organizing Lessons

The roles of different kinds of platforms can differ in a distance programme. An institution can choose to use a live lesson service that has been approved and put tasks on Moodle/GC and agree on a means of supporting questions. Where appropriate, it could be easier to send email or use a messaging system that is permitted. The following are examples of arrangements, and are not necessarily suggestions of what every institution should use. Combinations appropriate to the level of access for learners, institutional policy and to the level of communication necessary for the task(s) should be selected.

A course needs to have a centre and/or routine. There should be no need for students to check with several groups to find documents or new directions. For example, in one week's message the purpose of the learning task, materials, task and submission/report feedback may all be delivered. A teacher is able to identify the required tasks from those recommended for practice. This is beneficial for students that have to coordinate access to the same cell phone or manage employment and domestic duties. Consistency of organization is especially important when learners cannot adjust their English vocabulary use (word use and meaning in their L2) from their L1 contexts to understand the academic instructions.

Before conducting an access review, a platform decision must be made. Teachers can ask the students whether they have a device that can be used, whether their data connection is reliable, whether there is somewhere to listen to the presentation and whether there are ways to present the results of the discussion in audio or text format. Having a smartphone doesn't imply a student will be able to access it in a scheduled lesson. Additionally, teachers will be monitoring to determine their knowledge and understanding of the necessary procedures. A trial submission may allow for the identification of issues which can occur in the formally submitted work-up. Students should have the ability to report access issues, without embarrassment in front of fellow students.

Another task for the week's sequence might be describing an event. Students are to be given a brief audio stimulus and a writing task. They identify the events, key terms and questions using agreed communication channels. They share information on an event that happened to them with their partner in a live session followed by follow-up questions. Afterwards they present a retelling or some kind of observation. The partner exchange may take place through voice

messages if it is not possible to participate live. The aim is the realization of the outlines of a clear story – the realization of a different digital activity was not.

Task directions should be explicit on what students need to create, who it will be sent to and how it will be evaluated. "Watch the video and learn (or practice) English" is too general. What is helpful is to ask learners to pay attention to the speaker, take notes, give a short response and ask one partner one related question. Students need not write a model response—teachers can create a model response. A checklist can be used to ensure that learners check that they have done a job before it is handed in for marking.

It is easier to go back to a brief record of a resource than to a long film with numerous points to be learnt. An explanation can be broken down into small components, and for each of these students can be presented with an attention question. A write-up of the summary of a blocked-out video may be given to students. There was no attempt made to make things uniform in the lesson, activities or recording length. It should be available to help learners to understand and do. Technical decoration should not distract from the language feature and/or the communicative purpose for which the resource has been created.

For example, a weekly reading passage, instructions on the reading tasks, and the form for submitting the tasks could all be used in a Google Classroom-based online course. The student can write a couple of paragraphs to summarize what that character chooses to do, and then receive focused revision instructions. If an individual is not able to use that option to submit work, he/she may use another option allowed for by the Learning Agency. Here, it's not about the impact of a digital classroom on writing, but rather it's about organizing a sequence for writing. The teacher will still have to verify that the meaning has been understood and provide a rationale for an edit.

Three activities can be grouped into a single unit as follows: a discussion question, access to a listening resource (on a Moodle-based course) and a response task (on a Moodle-based course). The students can then list the reasons on a short record in written form and then add their own reason in a dialogue. A partner can ask a question that requires the other partner to clarify their response. The teacher should ensure that in the unit there is some real language being used as well as only downloadable documents. The same series of procedures can also be followed with a different adequate procedure if this is more practicable, being considered in terms of institutional accessibility and/or learner experience.

In cases where there is a problem to be solved, presented for discussion, the live lesson can be conducted using an approved meeting service, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Learners may discuss the possible options for an event for students and state their choices. Direct pair work can be technically achieved; the teacher could do so following the description of the task. Where this is not feasible, shortening and reducing the teacher-to-teacher interaction or teacher-to-partner interaction could be a more feasible course. It is important to ensure that if a connection fails, a fallback instruction will be provided to the student to inform him/her of the actions to take.

If appropriate under the rules of the institution and the learner's circumstances, an authorised WhatsApp group may be used to make a simple exchange of voice messages. The teacher asks a brief question, students answer and they ask each other for missing information. Too many tasks should not be provided as a way to stuff too many lengthy recordings into a group for anyone to have time to listen to. The student(s) should recognize whether they should answer in the

group or individually. If the learners can't participate in the messaging, the telephone response could be considered. It is not intended to be continually accessible or displayed.

A teacher can use email to help with distance teaching without having to rely upon a live teaching session for each lesson. The teacher can give a reading, task and due date. Students compose a draft and receive a focused comment (also known as a "clean-up" comment) prior to rewriting. Subject lines and file names should all use a consistent theme to help identify work. There's no guarantee of interaction with email only: We need to make questions, responses and feedback part of email. This exercise is more beneficial than a general 'sending' of unclear or changing directives.

Papers can be handed out so that they can work on their advice with new learners of English. Every student provides an example, reads the other student's new example and suggests a clarification for the other student. The group then verifies whether the advice given is interpreted in the same way. When joint editing is not available, it may be possible to provide partners with a draft to edit separately and have the drafts collated later. If a learning task is collaborative, remind teachers to include prompts to solicit feedback from students about some of the revised versions, to ensure reporting. The activity should be assessed on the quality of English and the feedback used, not on equal participation (which is assumed where a neatly formatted document is created).

Practical Examples for Developing English Skills

Instruction in listening can start with prediction and a definite purpose in listening. A teacher may give a short announcement title, and have the students guess what information they are expecting. Students listen for the main ideas on the initial listening. During a subsequent listening, they take notes about the action, location, or event that was needed. Having a transcript available will then allow them to study challenging parts. The sequence gets the students to differentiate between understanding the whole message and understanding details in the message, and prevents each listening activity from becoming an exercise in remembering isolated words.

For instance, a student can hear a call-out for a library workshop. They know who should join, their role and the input they should be prepared to bring to the event. In the follow-up task, they are asked to leave a voice message that describes the arrangement with an absent friend. Another learner listens and checks that the information offered is complete. The activity relates comprehension and communication. Where learners are unable to download audio, their teacher may read the announcement during a prearranged telephone contact as long as this is reasonable, such as not incurring an unreasonable expense.

Practise speaking to express ideas and respond to others. It is fine to start with a private session if it is difficult to speak in public. They can then progress to pair exchanges and to small discussion groups. Lee and Drajati (2019) studied the informal use of digital English, affective variables, and willingness to communicate among Indonesian university EFL students. Their results from their questionnaires are correlational, not causal. They encourage attention to productive participation and confidence without making a firm statement that all online activities contribute to the development of speaking skills.

A request-making activity is an example of meaningful interaction. The teacher provides an example of a brief conversational lecture about a request for information, being made politely. Each partner is given a different piece of information on an imagined college activity. Learners need to enquire about missing details in order to fill in the missing information. If immediate

exchange is desired, a live meeting can be used; alternatively, voice messages can be used, allowing more preparation time. The teacher needs to understand that this is not the same and needs to take it into account when evaluating performance. When explaining and answering an unexpected question, a rehearsed recording will not demonstrate all the skills needed at a moment's notice.

A second speaking example is a community project that has to be decided upon by a group of people. Students propose alternatives, justify choices, make comparisons and choose one alternative. The teacher may assign roles: to introduce the issue, seek reasons, summarize the alternatives and report the decision. Opportunities should be shared, not reserved for a particular group that is more confident. An individual brief follow-up might have each student give a description of one selection. This assists the teacher to view each student's contribution that may not be visible in a group recording.

Pronunciation activities should be directed towards comprehensible communication. Students listen to a short model and observe sound quality (stress, pauses or change in meaning). They put out a practice version and then use the feature in a new one. For instance, activities which involve students comparing two modes of travel can give them practice in stressing the contrasting words. Explain to the listeners how the change will benefit them. The goal is improved communication, not stripping an individual student away from being themselves or from having more than one accent in spoken English.

Learning activities for reading should be focused on more than just correct answers to factual or simple questions: they should be planned to "look at meaning and purpose". One could send out a short notice, an article, a story or just an email to the teacher, and ask the learner to guess whom it might be intended for and what it might be about. Students are able to put a check mark by the sentence that backs up their answer or indicate that they do not know. The discussion may be in a forum or by written communication. Teachers should ensure that text is available and that students will not only see photographs of the pages which are difficult to read on a small screen.

For instance, children could look at two notices for training courses. They are differentiated in time, quality, in access conditions and with the support of people targeted. Learners make one recommendation for a course for an imaginary student who has expressed a course need. A partner raises objections to a recommendation on another piece of information that is also incorporated in the notices. This will give reading with a communicative function. It also recommends that students provide evidence, not copying sentences, to back up a particular opinion. The final answer may be oral and/or written, as appropriate to the main objective of the lesson.

Writing instruction can be divided into planning, drafting, feedback and revision. Instructions and different drafts could be saved on an online platform, and, if access is available, the platform could be used to collaborate on a document. There should, however, be an obvious educational intent. The student has to have an understanding of the part of writing being practiced. Organizing reasons requires a different form of assistance than verb form editing. It is difficult to follow and implement the feedback when all the errors are corrected in one go.

For students needing an e-mail writing assignment, have them ask clarifying questions about an assignment. They are polite towards the reader and have an explicit question. Partners make sure that the request is useful and that no important details or documents are missing from it.

The teacher can address one or two common mistakes prior to rewriting. If a shared document is not feasible, the handwritten notes in an e-mail submission can be used. The assessment needs to be based around the writing objective and not on the knowledge of a specific editing tool.

For collaborative writing, individual responsibility is of paramount importance. Each group member will write a section of information for a new student to take; it may be possible to create a brief guide for other group members. Each member checks whether the sections match and makes the sentences sound consistent. Explanations should be given by the learner(s) of what they added/changed. This is helpful as it might not be evident in the group text. The ideal of collaboration shouldn't be to have everyone help if they are able, but to discuss what they mean, and to make an improvement to a common product; this doesn't just mean the most able student writing the most difficult pieces. Collaborate to talk through meaning and improve their product, not write the more complicated products and then send it to the strongest writer to make it even better for others.

There is a potential for connecting meaning, context and use in the teaching of vocabulary. Students read a section and select a couple of words or phrases of the text that they need to use, and write down their meaning in this context with their own examples. Some of these recommendations might be captured in a class vocabulary area. Teacher review is needed because entries can be added by other students, and there may be errors in entries that the teacher may publish later. The students can then extend the language of the expressions in a short sentence or paragraph. The aim is to provide vocabulary that will be available for communication rather than to gauge the number of screenshots or word lists that have been saved.

Multiple-choice grammar practice doesn't have to be the only way to practice grammar! Following an explanation, students can then take examples to make comparisons and see how meaning changes. A brief report of a normal experience and interview may be the result of learning about something in the past. Feedback can be provided on a recurring problem area in an attempt to revise and/or retell. An auto-marked quiz assessment can be used to assess understanding of a point to a limited extent; however, it is not suitable to be used on its own to determine application of the form in conversation and extended writing.

The integration of these skills can be achieved in an integrated project. A short text can be given to the students on a local issue, after which they will hear an explanation, discuss the answer they shared in a listening activity and afterwards give a report of which they make an oral summary. Teachers should designate reasonable sources and individual tasks. The project shouldn't require students to take trips or submit personal information or use expensive equipment. The written product explanation and audio description may be adequate to fill product needs. There is no focus on "prodigiously" made video, but rather the use and editing of "good" language.

For example, an activity can involve reviewing literature. Students read a short story, and complete a response about a character's decisions, either agreeing or disagreeing. Partners search for evidence related to their questions in the text. There is further writing to build on the extended response, which continues to be a paragraph. Students may first talk about an idea in an unfamiliar language (other than English) and then attempt to express the idea in English. This support should support understanding but not be at the expense of the language objective. The activity is connected with the interpretation, discourse and writing but not the equal learning preparedness.

Feedback Assessment and Equitable Participation

Feedback should highlight an action that the learner can take. A teacher can highlight a good aspect and a learning priority. If an explanation is written, this could involve explaining a missing part of an explanation or slowing down a part where the explanation isn't clear. For writing, it may be a concession following a general premise. Comments must be comprehensible and of a size and scope that can be used. A later opportunity for learners to apply them is required. Post-course feedback doesn't have as many chances to assist the next performance.

Modelling can make peer response available to an audience. Students can state what they got, ask one focused question and make a suggestion for where they need information. Accurate identification of all grammatical errors is not expected. It is essential to know what to say at the end of a line that will be treated with respect, particularly if meant in a short written comment that could be harsh. It is important for teachers to clarify that dissension may be based upon a concept rather than a criticism of the teacher. The level of interaction does not necessarily indicate a strong forum; there may be lots of comments without any good value added.

Evaluation should reflect the language in which instruction is delivered and/or the language that students are expected to learn. The different performances are measured by a vocabulary quiz, a new paragraph and a conversation. They should not be considered a substitute for general measures of overall achievement by the teacher. The following steps might be taken: Students should have criteria set out before the task and be aware of the support available. A combination of prepared work and short individual follow-up may provide a more complete picture, where possible. Marks should not be awarded for highly priced equipment or an appealing home setting or editing abilities, if these are not linked to the English-learning objective.

Learning can be monitored by the completion of similar tasks at various stages of the course. Students could write similar requests, or describe the following familiar processes. Changes in difficulty, preparation, and assistance are important things to be noted by teachers. A later strong response does not mean an improvement; it merely suggests so. Learner satisfaction also offers useful data on experience, although this does not directly evidence language achievements. Evaluation should differentiate between access, participation, confidence and performance, rather than lumping them together and making a statement of success.

No problem can be solved with an abstract solution. Dhawan (2020) talks about opportunities and challenges of online learning in the COVID-19 crisis. This concern might be implemented in a distance English course by providing manageable files, and flexible time limits for response as well as alternatives to constant videoing. If a student does not attend a live lesson, they can still complete an equivalent language task in a future lesson. If a student is absent, an inquiry should be made about the barrier, rather than interpreting the absence as a lack of effort. The truth about flexibility is that it has to be organized, not sacrificed because of the absence of expectations.

Digital education is acknowledged by different types of access conditions and modes as mentioned by the PRAGYATA guidelines provided by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (2020). This importance is expanded to the need for alternatives if constant traffic cannot be achieved. Any broadcast or downloaded material can be used as input for English instruction, as long as there is a practical way for learners to respond to it. Printed prompts may be used in addition to, but are no substitute for oral practice. Teachers and institutions need to

determine who is unable to attend online, how these students will be guided and who will demonstrate or model the desired language skill.

There also needs to be explicit support in distance learning to deal with work. A small goal for students, an estimation of the amount of time needed and a check of the result of the goal can be useful. A short learning record may record the task or activity, one difficulty and a next step. This is not to be another extra-long essay. It's designed to assist learners in making decisions. Independent study does not automatically lead to self-study and giving out work online does not necessarily develop any habits in the organization and completion of the work.

A teacher should be able to relate educational and technical decisions and develop the ability to integrate them in various educational settings in teacher preparation. Staff should practice, in their own hands-on work, how to give clear online instructions, how to organize interactions, how to access readily available materials, and how to offer feedback on work. It should be their aim too to become familiar with the duties called for by their selected arrangements. Institutional support can offer resources, support and opportunities for discussion about issues. It's simply not possible for a teacher to master a lot of different platforms. A few tried and true procedures can aid in more consistent instruction and reduce the need to learn a new system again and again.

Promoting privacy and wellbeing should form a part of everyday organization processes. Students will be informed as to who has access to, and whether recording of their work will form part of the course. However, the obligation to be public does not necessarily need to be the means of establishing innovation. It is important that for minors and those learners in need of additional support there is appropriate provision. There are opportunities for teachers to set up contact hours and not expect to be available on an around-the-clock basis. Camera work should not be the means to the end of a camera presence. If applicable, spoken and/or written responses to the task provide more evidence of student understanding.

Conclusion

Distance English teaching can enable follow-up learning as long as it can be linked to the realization of objectives and the understanding of language input, language use with meaning, evaluation feedback and practice. These processes can be managed online, but cannot be processed in place of thoughtful teaching practices. Live communication can be mixed with other activities worked up at other times; ways of carrying the activity out even if there is limited access must also be provided; the language abilities actually taught can be assessed. Successful distance learning is based upon supported participation and a meaningful form of communication, not on screen time or the number of applications used.

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