

## DISTANCE LEARNING: CHALLENGES, POSSIBILITIES, SOLUTIONS

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Abstract. The paper aims to analyse the possibilities and methods of e-learning ESP courses. The teachers/learners' experiences are evaluated by documenting various distance learning organizational forms. Hypertext is examined as a device allowing students to work with information in different ways to fit different purposes and contexts.

Learning in the current century is bound up with work and everyday activities. The reality has posed a double challenge for the ESP teachers: designing up-to-date ESP materials and mastering multimedia-/ hypermedia information technologies by incorporating them into educational programs.

It is generally agreed that the use of technology in education helps develop the learner's skills. Students are viewed as taking part in knowledge construction and mastering skills when defining and analyzing objectives, collecting information, brainstorming, interacting and transferring information for use in other situations. In 2008-2011 being ESP teachers we had the opportunity to design a distant learning course for students specializing in IT sphere. The idea was to offer our students a special course to introduce them to the kind of English they would need to deal with in their target professional situations. Students came together in a virtual asynchronous classroom and were involved in readings, comprehension exercises, reaction readings, problem solving, projects, assignment consisting of analysis, etc. The experience enabled us to see distance education from the advantages and shortcoming of this educational form and the perspective of the learner.

The digital content formats can be tailored to student's individual learning style. Students who learn visually can rely on charts and videos, those who learn analytically can use text and data. Between the learning devices hypertext is regarded as an ideal one with enormous potential to improve teaching-learning process. Its specific textual framework promotes connectivity, preservation and accessibility of knowledge via hyperlinks. Hypertext enables learners to assess the existing knowledge in a certain sphere, to construct a database and to fill the gaps in the materials needed. This device allows information to be twisted, reformulated and recombined in different ways to fit different purposes and contexts. The weakest part of distance learning in terms of ESP lies in the area of speaking. Teachers and their students can speak to each other via videoconferencing and teleconferencing, but busy telephone lines and slow modems often result in frustration. It is proposed to limit teleconferencing to «office hours» and have an on-site tutor available to help students practice speaking. Another alternative is to hold an intensive training session on speaking after students have finished program modules. As a long-term strategy we consider the construction of an educational technology-based, asynchronous distance learning interaction to "link" high school teachers, students and classrooms with outstanding scientists from IT, economic and other fields and a faculty largely through the creation and development of student-centered, "hands-on", web-based instructional modules in these sciences, and an ESP Teachers Support network. Taking into account the experience of modeling an ESP course in a distant mode e-learning highlights such problematic areas as: policies, objectives and standards for a distance education program based on the methodology, the study process methods and techniques and needs analysis; ESP course contents to respond to specific needs; pre-service and in-service training of course designers and teaching staff.