# SKYPE-LESSONS: PROS AND CONS FOR SCHOOLS

# Starodubtseva L. G.

The Internet creation cannot be overestimated as one of the greatest achievements of scientific and technical advance. At the same time, being crucially important tools for information search and data exchange among those who already know foreign languages the World Wide Web and computer technologies can give required help to those being on the way of language learning.

In this work we discuss a method of learning foreign languages, which is based on the Internet technologies. They are language lessons with the usage of the Internet program Skype. It can be considered a distant-training method as a student does not have to go to a certain institution where the educational process takes place, but having chosen a distant-training course, stays at home or at work while studying. This advantage of the method is especially significant for specialists whose fast pace of life and large amount of information to be learnt in their professional sphere limit the time they can spend on language study.

When speaking about lessons by means of the Skype program usage we should note that in this case the teacher is an integral part of the education process, and even despite the fact that the teacher is far away and training completely depends on technology, and namely computer equipment, high quality Internet connection, and of course, power supply, a strict control of the learning process is provided. In this case, despite the fact the teacher can be called virtual, he/she makes study active, has an opportunity to organize a high quality process of learning.

It should also be emphasized that lessons can be in real time and in a non-active mode. However, distant training in real time brings much more positive results, as direct communication between a teacher and a student allows instant creation of language immersion, and, if problems arise due to the fact that a student may fail to understand a certain topic being studied, there is always a possibility to turn to the teacher for help. Moreover, a student can have an immediate response and remarks on mistakes, if there are some.

Therefore, close informational interaction facilitates an effective study process, since, on the one hand, all skills are practiced during the lesson, knowledge of grammar is acquired and improved, as well as vocabulary is enriched; and on the other hand, the process of study is less time-consuming and tiring, because neither a student nor a teacher spends time on travel to a place of study. The time saved allows a teacher to concentrate on the methods of teaching and pay more attention to students, which is also one of the undoubted advantages of Skype lessons.

According to the English teacher, Anna Kotova who has done a survey on advantages and disadvantages of learning with the help of Internet-based technologies, Skype lessons can be conventionally divided into two types. The first one is when the lessons almost do not differ from traditional forms. The other one involves inclusion of only speech practice.

At the same time, the English teacher Eveline Hesse who implements the first form of Skype lessons, claims that the course of a virtual lesson is the same as in a real class. It consists of revision of the previous material and introduction of a new topic with practice in the form of various vocabulary and grammar exercises, etc. However, the lesson time is not spent on checking home assignment, as it is usually sent to the teacher by the students in advance via e-mail or to the chat. Consequently, more time is left for practice, which can sometimes be a problem in a real class.

The second type of Skype lessons is supported by the head of Ukrainian virtual school “Language Online”, Volodymyr Hromushko, who claims that learning a foreign language via the Internet is, first of all, interesting for those whose aim is to master or practise a spoken language. Therefore the majority of the language learners at this school are young people travelling much, using the Internet actively and being on the way of making a career.

One more point of view on the main emphasis in terms of language skills is suggested by Viktor Mashchenko, another English teacher conducting lessons via Skype. He insists that to master a foreign language a person must read and listen, and the only reason for giving a written assignment is a student’s request for it. It should be admitted that such a type of lessons is rather far from generally accepted academic classes.

Anna Kotova also mentions the opinion of a 23-year-old Skype tutor Max Nogaj from Germany who is convinced that Internet lessons of a foreign language should resemble a simple free talk of old friends, without any explanation of grammar rules at all, as it is not of vital importance since a conversation on everyday life topics require only introduction and practice of new vocabulary.

Unfortunately, Skype lessons have their disadvantages compared to other types of learning a foreign language. The most frequent problem which is faced by absolutely all participants of the Skype study process is technical troubles, such as

- a sudden disconnection with the World Wide Web due to absence of electricity for different reasons;

- a poor connection when the participants of the study process fail to hear or see each other properly;

- a failure to go to necessary electronic on-line resources (a site is out of order, etc.);

- troubles with electronic devices and computer hardware, etc.

Troubleshooting may sometimes be rather time-consuming and involve replacement of the equipment, therefore it becomes difficult to adjust to a new schedule, or even to new equipment in case the old devices are completely out of order.

Secondly, there are groups of people who are unlikely to find this type of lessons convenient and acceptable. These are elderly people and children under the age of 10 years old.

As for the first group, elderly people tend to be conservative and prefer to do without any up-to-date technologies in any field of their activity, including education. They often find the way they were taught in their childhood and at a young age to be the most adequate and reasonable.

Speaking about children, it is quite obvious that they need only a real teacher staying beside them in the room, because their attention must be grabbed and held all the time as they are too easily distracted from the lesson by external factors, such as noises, other people who may accidentally enter the room, various advertisements on the Internet, which may seem more interesting to a child than the information offered to them by the teacher.

The third group of people who cannot be advised to learn a foreign language with the application of the Skype program includes those people who like studying together with others. Since it is a proved fact that when more than two people are sitting in front of the display it is hard for them to concentrate on the lesson itself and not to interfere with the others trying to focus on the topic of the lesson. Skype lessons are ideal for a conversation or acceptable for maximum two students having a lesson at one and the same time.

In conclusion, it is necessary to say that despite the fact that currently the number of people who prefer to study via Skype in Ukraine is still growing, the prospects for this method for primary and secondary schools are not very optimistic.

Firstly, because it depends on the speed of the Internet spreading over the whole territory including small villages where there are no native speakers and which are experiencing a lack of highly qualified teachers. Secondly, as it has already been mentioned, Skype-lessons are not suitable either for children under 12 or for a large group of pupils.

Nevertheless, lessons via Skype may become a perfect way out for children on home education or for those pupils who cannot attend school regularly for different reasons. Moreover, school teachers whose duty is to teach pupils on home education can also benefit from such a form of education greatly, as they do not need to spend time on travel to a pupil’s home in any weather, and thus save time for more profound preparation for classes. And what is more, teachers are able to have more classes with home-educated children and consequently their salary rises.

To sum up, it seems quite reasonable for school administrations to consider implementation of Skype-lesson practice as a teaching method at schools.

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