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Scientific article

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The use of grammar-translation and communicative methods in teaching foreign languages to university students in online format: review from students' perspective

Abstract: Nowadays, there are many different foreign language teaching methods. To improve the effectiveness of the learning process, it is necessary to constantly analyze the direct impact of teaching methods on the motivation of students, the degree of mastering the skills and competencies of a foreign language and their academic performance. As we know, the Covid 19 pandemic has brought changes to all areas of human activity, including the education process. Almost all Kazakhstan universities have switched to online learning. The aim of this study was to examine how students perceive the grammar-translation (traditional) and the communicative methods of teaching foreign languages. The following aspects were considered, namely, (a) students' general experiences and attitudes of online learning, (b) students' experiences of using grammar-translation and communicative methods, and (c) students' perception of the combination of these two methods. It was concluded that the most effective way of application grammar-translation and communicative methods is their combination both in the online and offline mode of teaching.

Keywords: teaching methods, grammar-translation method, communicative method, online learning, foreign language teaching, English language teaching.

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Научная статья

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Использование грамматико-переводного и коммуникативного методов в обучении иностранным языкам студентов университета в режиме онлайн: обзор с точки зрения студентов

Аннотация: В настоящее время существует множество различных методов обучения иностранному языку. Для повышения эффективности учебного процесса необходимо постоянно анализировать непосредственное влияние методов обучения на мотивацию студентов, степень овладения навыками и компетенциями иностранного языка и их успеваемость. Как мы знаем, пандемия COVID-19 внесла изменения во все сферы человеческой деятельности, включая образовательный процесс. Почти все казахстанские университеты перешли на онлайн-обучение. Целью данного исследования было изучить, как студенты воспринимают грамматико-переводной (традиционный) и коммуникативный методы обучения иностранным языкам. Были рассмотрены следующие аспекты, а именно: общий опыт и отношение студентов к онлайн-обучению, опыт студентов в использовании грамматико-переводного и коммуникативного методов и восприятие студентами сочетания этих двух методов. Был сделан вывод, что наиболее эффективным способом применения грамматико-переводного и коммуникативного методов является их сочетание как в онлайн-, так и в офлайн-режиме обучения.

Ключевые слова: методы обучения, грамматико-переводной метод, коммуникативный метод, онлайн-обучение, преподавание иностранных языков, преподавание английского языка.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives and made its own adjustments in almost every sphere of human life. The entire planet has had to change their everyday life habits in order to counteract the spreading of the virus. The field of education is no exception; almost all educational institutions throughout the world have switched to online learning to keep their students, teachers and employees safe. Teachers and students had to adapt to these new tools like online video conferencing platforms and e-learning portals. At the beginning, it was very difficult for some teachers and students to adapt to these changes. They miss the traditional form of education and suffer from a lack of live contact and socialization. However, Huiwei Cai believes that E-learning will help to ease the complicated labour of teachers' and will give the students an opportunity to improve their language skills (Cai, 2012). Thus, we observe the existence of both positive and slightly negative opinions about online teaching and learning. At present, some Kazakhstani educational institutions are gradually returning to the traditional form of teaching and learning depending on the epidemiological situation in the region.

In this regard, we want to analyze how this situation has affected the process of teaching foreign languages to university students. The process of training future foreign language teachers aims at comprehensive preparation of highly qualified professionals capable of taking part in discussions, freely expressing their thoughts in a foreign language, able to transfer knowledge about the language to other language learners. The curriculum of the educational program "Foreign language: two foreign languages" is mainly aimed at the development of students' grammatical competencies as well as their communicative skills. These two notions are bonded together due to the well-known believe that grammar knowledge is very important for having good communications skills (Souisa, Yanuarius, 2020). According to Chang, Shih-Chuan, the current grammar teaching in universities is still characterized by the appliance of the grammar-translation method (Chang, 2011). Equally popular is the communicative method of teaching foreign languages because of the growing trend of making emphasis on skills rather than knowledge (Van Vooren, Casteleyn, Mottart, 2012). Therefore, the grammar-translation and the communicative methods of teaching foreign languages are the most popular and highly used methods of teaching nowadays all over the world (Van Vooren, Casteleyn, Mottart, 2012).

Literature review. The historical overview and comparative analysis of grammar translation and communicative teaching methods have been conducted by many different authors, such as Chang, S.-C. (Chang, 2011), Richards J., Rodgers T. (Richards, Rodgers, 1986), Yatsun Y., Kolisnichenko N. (Kolisnichenko, Yatsun, 2018), Winch J. (Winch, 2019), Natsir, M. & Sanjaya, D. (Natsir, Sanjaya, 2014) and others. Grammar-translation method (GTM) is one of the oldest methods in the history of teaching foreign languages. GTM is also called as traditional or classical because it was first applied to the teaching of classical languages like Greek and Latin (Nagy, 2020). Richards J. and Rodgers T. define this method as a way of studying the language through the thorough analysis of grammar notions and rules, followed by application of this knowledge when translating sentences and texts (Richards, Rodgers, 1986). According to Pin Ju Wang, the main goal of using grammar translation method is to help students to develop their reading skills and improve their knowledge of grammar rules and their application (Pin Ju Wang, 2008). This method of teaching is mainly characterized by deductive teaching of grammar through the presentation and following backward and forward translation exercises for memorizing some speech patterns and analyzing the grammar rules taught earlier (Richards, Rodgers, 1986). According to Threesje Roza Souisa and Lelyemin Yanuarius, the more students know about the grammar of the language, the better they can express their thoughts and improve their communication skills (Souisa, Yanuarius, 2020). However, in the process of teaching using GTM, little attention is paid to speaking and listening skills, as well as the content of the material. It mainly

concentrates on reading and writing skills (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). From its inception, this method was entirely focused on developing the knowledge of grammar (Kolishnichenko, Yatsun, 2018). That is why this method is sometimes considered by some teachers and learners as ineffective in the formation of student's communicative skills and boring for students because of exercises and drillings that do not pay attention to the content of the language. However, many linguists claim that knowing the grammatical structure of the language is highly essential for the language learners.

Communicative method of teaching foreign languages (CMT) is just as popular as grammar translation method (GTM). As its name suggests, the need for communication was the main reason for the emergence of this method (Sattorova, 2021). CMT is widely used by university teachers due to the fact that it implies collaborative exchange of ideas in a friendly atmosphere almost on any topic. It is the most important characteristic of this method because communicative competences of students can be developed through increasing their motivation by involving them into meaningful language interaction situations (Jin, Yoo, 2019). Furthermore, CMT pays more attention to the students' personal experiences as well as current requirements of social interaction. Kolishnichenko, N. N., and Yatsun, Y. M. emphasize that this method enables teachers to develop all basic linguistic skills of students simultaneously, such as speaking, listening, reading and writing (Kolishnichenko, Yatsun, 2018). Nevertheless, teachers still face some challenges while implementing this method in the language classroom. Let's take for instance insufficient level of students' grammar skills and vocabulary knowledge making them unable to express their thoughts fully or interact with co-learners freely. Just in this case, the communicative method of teaching is sometimes inferior to the grammar-translation method of teaching, due to the reason that it is very difficult for beginner learners to dive into the conversation process without the necessary background knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Kolishnichenko, Yatsun, 2018).

Among the main differences between these two teaching methods we can highlight that the GTM is a more teacher-centered method while CMT is a student centered one (Annenkova, 2012). That's why, according to the researchers from Korea, learners feel uncomfortable when the entire process of communication belongs to them while the teacher becomes only the coordinator for them (Jin, Yoo, 2019). It should also be pointed that grammar-translation method is more limited in spontaneous conversation than communicative method of teaching foreign languages (Annenkova, 2012). Next, regarding the language of instruction, the native language of learners is used more in the GTM than in CMT. According to the comparative analysis made by the authors Natsir, M. and Sanjaya, D., CMT is mainly focused on different authentic teaching materials while in GTM all learning material is prepared by the teacher or taken from a particular book. So, it means that GTM limits the opportunities of diving into the real social or daily context; it is more automatic and focused on making students able to translate every single word without paying attention to the context (Natsir, Sanjaya, 2014). While the main advantage of CMT is the teaching of students to produce their thought automatically without translating them from their native language to foreign language. It also helps students to overcome the psychological barrier since a lot of attention is paid to spoken language (Yuldasheva, Aminova, 2020).

The main differences of the above described methods are the focus on the different skills of language acquisition, the variation in the role of the teacher and students in the learning process, as well as the variety and type of tasks being applied while using these two methods.

The goal of the research. The purpose of this study was to investigate the students' attitudes towards the grammar-translation and communicative methods of teaching FL, as well as their combination in the context of online teaching and learning. Based on the theoretical overview of the above-mentioned teaching methods we believe that combining both methods will have a better effect on students' academic performance and motivation than using one of them in isolation.

Methods

To achieve the goal of this study, a survey was conducted among 21 students of 2nd and 3rd years of study, majoring in the educational program "Foreign Language: Two Foreign Languages" in two universities of Semey (Kazakhstan): Shakarim University of Semey and Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University (rebranded into Alikhan Bokeikhan University on 08.09.2021). Respondents filled an online

questionnaire on the Google drive platform: <https://forms.gle/hPr2uZrgdJNWEjHy7>. The survey was conducted anonymously and sent to all participants through e-mail and WhatsApp messengers.

Results

A statistical and comparative analysis was conducted based on the results obtained. The majority of respondents (81 %) were between the ages of 18 to 20. In the current period of time, all participants of the survey are studying in the online mode. One of the questions of the questionnaire concerned the most common difficulties encountered in online learning. Thus, 67 % of the respondents indicated that the main difficulty was the problems associated with Internet provider, while 24 % of young people connected their problems with a psychological part of the matter: inability to organize discussions and low interest in it (Figure 1).

Which difficulties (from those listed below) arise most often when learning online?

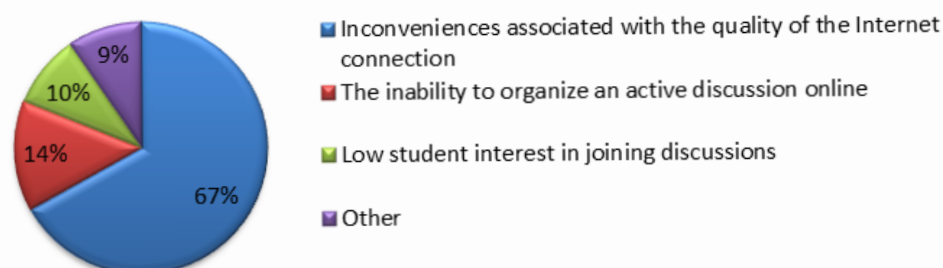


Fig. 1. Difficulties concerning the online mode of learning

Рис. 1. Трудности, связанные с онлайн-режимом обучения

In order to define the interrelation between students' motivation (resulting in their academic achievements) and online learning, respondents were asked about their own experience of learning in the distance mode. As a result, 43 % of the students indicated that it didn't significantly affect their grades, 38 % of the respondents instead became more motivated and improved their academic achievements. Only 19 % of the interviewees linked the decline in their academic achievements with the transition to online teaching mode (Figure 2).

According to your observations, did the transition to distance learning affect your academic achievements?

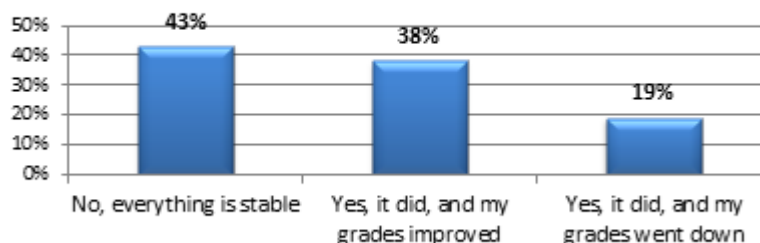


Fig. 2. The impact of online learning on the academic achievements of students

Рис. 2. Влияние онлайн-обучения на академические достижения студентов

Nevertheless, according to the results of the survey, regardless of all-above mentioned difficulties, almost half of the respondents (48 %) preferred to combine online and offline learning mode and 24 % of the students chose online mode, while the other part (28%) gave their preference to the traditional or offline learning mode (Figure 3).

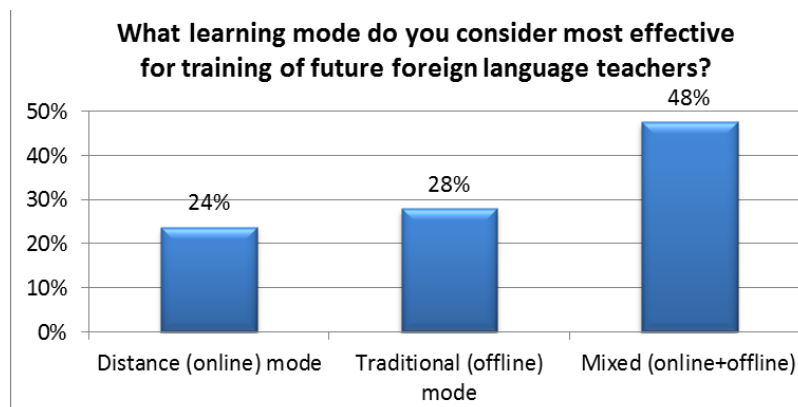


Fig. 3. Respondents' opinion regarding the most effective learning mode for training of future foreign language teachers

Рис. 3. Мнение респондентов о наиболее эффективной форме обучения будущих учителей иностранных языков

The following questions of the survey were related to the teaching methods used in the respondents' classes. The majority of the participants (52 %) indicated "Grammar-translation method" as the most widely used in their learning process. 33 % of the respondents chose the combination of both methods, meanwhile only 10% of them stated a communicative teaching method as a most often used method in their classes (Figure 4).

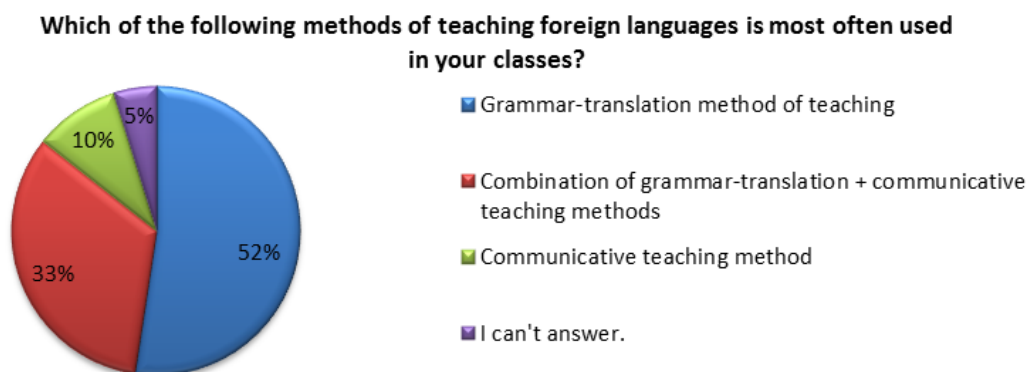


Fig. 4. Teaching methods most commonly used in practical English classes

Рис. 4. Методы обучения, наиболее часто используемые на практических занятиях по английскому языку

The survey attempted to identify the main difficulties encountered by students in the process of learning using the above methods. As we know from a theoretical part of our article, communicative teaching method is mainly focused on the oral discussion while a grammar translation method is concentrated on translating and drilling activities. So, the participants of the survey, most of the time, have difficulties when translating texts, because of insufficient knowledge of vocabulary (62 %), and the second reason (28 %) is low interest in this type of activity (Figure 5). Herewith, when discussing films or videos, the students have almost the same main problem – insufficient vocabulary (52 %), which then results in the language barrier (24 %) (Figure 6).

In class when discussing films or videos in a foreign language (after watching), what problems most often hinder active discussion?

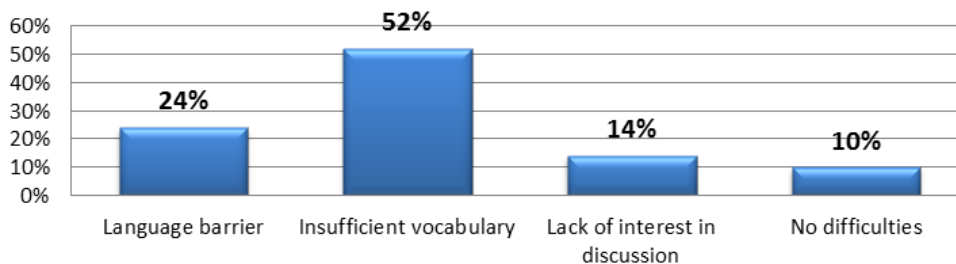


Fig. 5. Difficulties occurring in the process of learning with the use of GTM

Рис. 5. Трудности, возникающие в процессе обучения с использованием GTM

In classes while translating texts in a foreign language, what problems do you encounter most often?

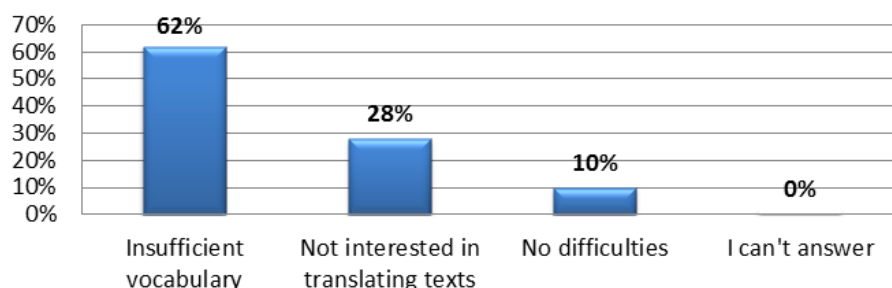


Fig. 6. Difficulties in the process of learning with the use of CMT

Рис. 6. Трудности в процессе обучения с использованием CMT

Moving on to the next question, 62 % of the respondents expressed a positive attitude toward a combination of GMT and CMT, 19 % of them chose only a communicative teaching method, while the rest of the participants (14 %) gave their preference to the grammar translation method (Figure 7).

Which teaching method (grammar-translation or communicative teaching method) in your opinion is the most effective and necessary to use in teaching students who are future foreign language teachers?

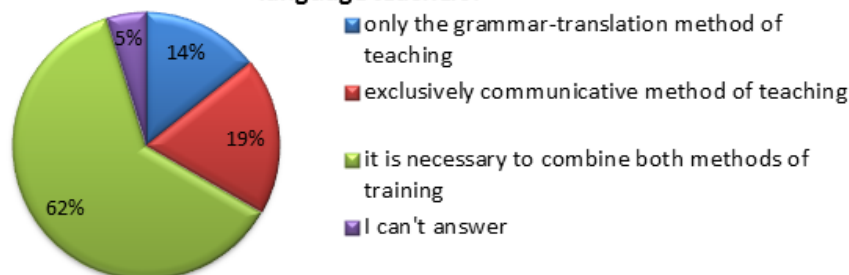


Fig. 7. Preference of students on the teaching methods

Рис. 7. Предпочтения студентов в отношении методов обучения

Conclusions

In conclusion, when choosing the methods of teaching students, teachers should pay more attention their opinions, feelings and preferences, which are of great importance. Therefore, we considered it necessary to review the choice of teaching methods from the students' perspective. According to the results of the survey, we can observe the equal popularity of these methods in the learning process and see that the majority of the respondents have a positive attitude towards both methods of teaching, as well as express their desire to combine them in their learning. Thus, based on the literature review and data gained from the conducted survey, we can assume that the most effective way of training future teachers of foreign languages is the combination of grammar-translation and communicative teaching methods in the context of both offline and online learning. Teachers should take into account students' opinions when choosing teaching methods for developing lesson plans in order to increase their motivation and encourage them make better progress. In addition, a lot of work should be done on the expanding the vocabulary of students, which then will result in the effectiveness of both methods, since the students are aware of one of the main problems of insufficient lexicon, which hinders the effectiveness of learning.

As for the transition to online learning mode, it did not significantly affect the effectiveness of the learning process. That's why online learning can be considered as an additional and no less effective form of teaching and learning. Despite some student opinions about the inconvenience and problems with the Internet connection, online learning is still a welcome way to learn.

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