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TELEGRAM BOT TECHNOLOGY AS A MEANS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION IN AVIATION ENGLISH LEARNING

Introduction. The process of education changes as time goes by, and these changes are inevitable. Education did not stop even in the times of hunger and war in the past. The pandemic of the COVID-19 turned out to be one more obvious challenge for the educational system. Had not there been such programs as Zoom, Discord and others we would have faced serious difficulties with learning many subjects.

We want to enhance the learning process in distance education. In our opinion the weak link in the distance education chain is the software — the programs used for these purposes are not supposed to be educational. That may have led to some inconveniences in context of education.

Main part. At the beginning of our attempt to increase the efficiency of distance educational technologies we should define this term so as to make it clear.

Cambridge dictionary defines distance education as a way of studying in which you do not attend a school, college, or university, but study from where you live, usually being taught and given work to do over the internet [1].

Teaster and Blieszner (1999) underlines that the term distance learning has been applied to many instructional methods. But its main difference is that the lecturer and learner have spatial separation [2].

Analysis of different definitions given in dictionaries and scientific works has shown similar points in all of them:

1. The separation of teacher and learner in space and in some cases in time.
2. The use of a wide spectrum of technologies.
3. The absence of necessity to attend a fixed place at a fixed time and what is more important.
4. The process of growth and change of learners.

In our report we are going to focus mainly on the existing means and technologies of distance education. In our university we have two basic technologies, they are Zoom and educational portal distance.uvauga.ru. One provides the video connection between the lecturer and the group of cadets, the other mainly provides access to home tasks and test materials. The facts are that there are disadvantages to both of these technologies. First, for unknown reasons university does not not provide lecturers with the license for zoom application and a conference lasts only up to 40 minutes. Secondly, the occasional breakdowns of Internet connection take up the priceless time of a lesson.

To address the issue let's have a closer look at educational portal distance.uvauga and conduct a survey. The results of the survey revealed that the scores that the cadets gave to distance.uvauga platform ranged between 3 and 4 points out of 5. It proved that the average level of the cadets' satisfaction with this educational portal is not as high as we would desire it to be. The majority of the cadets claimed that they had missed the opportunity to communicate with their lecturer directly via this platform as well as to discuss the tasks received. They also noted that some questions had more than one correct answer and it was apparently impossible to give the correct answer. Besides the distance.uvauga website interface leaves a lot to be desired in term of working with it via mobile device. The statistics revealed that the majority of the cadets would appreciate the opportunity to have the access to materials of achieved modules. They claimed that having this information at hand would give them an additional motivation and opportunity to drill and revise vocabulary.

Of course there was some positive feedback. Among the advantages it is worth mentioning that more than a half of all the respondents were happy to have the access to the website at any time and to see up-to-date news.

Then we interviewed our groupmates one more time. We conducted the *test consisting of 10 questions for checking residual knowledge.*

Its results revealed that the cadets managed to answer successfully from 4 to 8 questions. The results were not perfect as the survey showed. It could probably mean that the cadets did not have enough practice to turn passive vocabulary into active one.

To meet all these challenges, we decided to create our own platform for boosting Aviation English skills. The requirements for the new platform are: 1) to provide access from the mobile device as well as from the computer; 2) to make it simple to use for both teachers and cadets; 3) to reduce lecturers' workload; 4) everlasting access to the platform.

Keeping all the requirements in mind we came up with a solution and created a resource on the Telegram platform taking into account the ICAO language proficiency requirements for air traffic controllers and members of flight crew focusing on developing the highest language skills — interaction and comprehension.

The organization of this platform makes it possible to increase the amount of language practice for the students without overloading the lecturer. In most instances even homework is checked automatically.

It should be noted that Telegram bot is based on interactive principle and offers a wide range of tools such as vocabulary mode, listening mode, video mode, drilling mode and test mode. It is suitable both for learning Aviation English and for consolidating your knowledge.

So let us have a closer look at the interface and tools our bot provides. You can try it yourself if you have Telegram app downloaded. Figure 1 shows the QR code to navigate to the bot.

Figure 1 — QR code of AviationEnglishTestBot

After you have subscribed to the bot you find yourself in a menu where you can choose the necessary direction to move by pushing a button (figure 2). You may brush your vocabulary in “Vocabulary” mode which provides some tasks aiming at making your vocabulary active (figure 3). The selection result is shown in the figure 4. Possible test modes in dictionary mode are shown in figure 5.

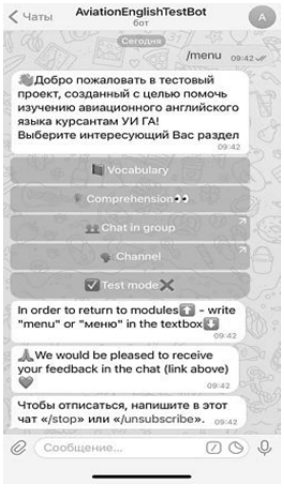

Figure 2 — Interface of the Bot

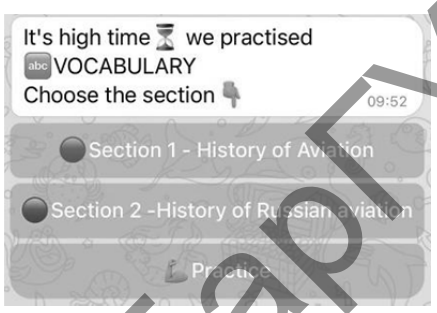

Figure 3 — Possible options in Vocabulary mode

Figure 4 — Dictionary of the Unit

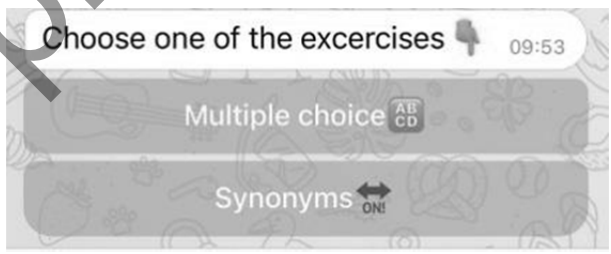

Figure 5 — Possible test modes in the Vocabulary mode

Moving on to the “Comprehension” mode which includes Listening and Video tasks aiming at improving comprehension. The mode designed to improve the Interaction skill is “Chat in group”. The cadets are allowed to communicate with one another. Regarding the uncertainty of cadets in their answers to either Listening or Video tasks this chat may serve a platform where the cadets will discuss possible answers.

The Channel Mode is in fact the only mode where the lecturer needs to do something. Writing messages in the Channel is only available for the lecturer so this would be a viable way to give homework tasks.

The “Test” mode consists of two options. The first includes the sentence to translate and giving definitions to the words. The task of the cadets in the second option is to answer the questions on a relevant subject.

Conclusion. We think that our bot meets all the requirements for the distance education technology which we admitted above. Nevertheless it is important to notice that it also has a minor disadvantage. This technology is entirely based on the Telegram platform. The range of functions and tools available for the educational process is limited by the possibilities of the messenger.

To conclude we would like to say that in our attempt to create this bot we tried to fulfill things we missed in our distance education. We hope that this technology will let other students learn Aviation English in a more efficient way.

References

1. Cambridge Dictionary [Electronic resource]. — Mode of access : https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/distance-education. — Date of access :12.04.2021.

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