

PROS AND CONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION TODAY  
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**Annotation:** In the last two years, distance learning has begun to develop in almost all countries of the world due to COVID-19. During the pandemic, almost all students and schoolchildren were under necessity to study online. And even now there are some universities, in which classes are still conducted remotely. This paper considers the benefits and drawbacks of distance learning and its impact on speaking and reading skills.

**Key words:** distance learning, listening, reading, ESL students.

In the last two years, distance learning has begun to develop in almost all countries of the world due to COVID-19. During the pandemic, almost all students and schoolchildren were under necessity to study online. And even now there are some universities, in which classes are still conducted remotely.

Before considering the benefits and drawbacks of distance education, we should contemplate the term “distance learning”

Sue Hewer (2012) gives a definition for the term of “distance learning” as a way of learning where students independently studying at a place, time and order suitable for them. Self-study programs supported by online tutors are one of the main features of this term.

According to Keegan(1990), distance learning consists of the following characteristics:

- The separation of the teacher and learners
- The use of technical media
- Provision of two-way communication
- The influence of an educational organization

Based on the above definitions, we can say that distance education is a self-study technology- based learning, delivered by a teacher from distance.

Positive aspects of distance learning

According to Wheatley and Greer (1995), the main benefit of distance education is saving travel time, as learners and teachers do not have to attend the campus.

Distance learning enables students to save money on expenses such as travelling, housing and education. In addition to this, university teachers are given the opportunity to improve their knowledge with outstanding scientists at a distance. Another positive aspect of e-learning is that learners can always listen to the lecture more than once and

stop the video lecture in order to fully comprehend the theme and digest the new information (Sokolova.N, Pylkin.A, Stroganova.O and Antonian.K, 2018).

Lucies Zormanova (2018)in her research identified three positive aspects of distance learning

- Lower time and financial demands
- Harmonization of family, work and study duties
- Quality study materials

Negative aspects of distance learning

Distance learning deprives students the life communication with the teacher and peers, as well as asking any questions to the lecturer. Another drawback of distance learning is that a one and a half hour lecture could not be replaced by 20-40 minutes presentation ( Sokolova.N, Pylkin.A, Stroganova.O and Antonian.K, 2018).

“Modern young people are accustomed to spending most of their time on the Internet using variety of gadgets”( Sokolova.N, Pylkin.A, Stroganova.O and Antonian.K, 2018). So such type of students may deceive parents by saying that they are doing online lessons, but in fact they are surfing the Internet.

Manjeh Sadeghi(2019) lists the disadvantages of distance learning as follows:

- High chances of distraction
- Complicated technology
- No social interaction
- Difficulty staying in contact with instructor

- Job markets do not accept online degree

Distance learning and its impact on speaking skill

Speaking is the most challenging skill. So learning this skill online may be a bit problematic for ESL learners.

ApisaraSritulanon, PannaChaturongakul and Thapanee Thammetar(2018)researched the way“English Speaking Teaching Model in Distance Education” affects the development of ESL students. They divided their study into four phases to explore a practical model to teach English speaking in distance.

According to questionnaires on students’ perception about first phase almost 76% of the respondents considered their speaking skills as fair or poor.

Results of the Second Model Implementation showed that only the moderate students had speaking ability improvement. The students’ in-depth interview disclosed that the students in two other groups did not follow the study skills mentioned in the model.

Results of the Third Model Implementation of the speaking mid-test showed that 37 out of 44 students’ speaking mid-test scores increased.However, there were seven students whose test scores did not increase, particularly one whose score decreased.

Based on this study, we may conclude that distance learning has both positive and negative effects on speaking improvement. Whether distance learning is beneficial or not for ESL speaking learners depends on the experience of the teacher, the given material and the level of the student.

#### Distance learning and reading comprehension

Jaime Alberto and Sergio Alonso (2012) state that study conducted among graduate students at Universidad de Antioquia, who have to certify reading comprehension in a foreign language to be admitted to the second semester of their study, showed different results. Students study online 120- hour course, which means 10 hours weekly on MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment)

The results showed that some students improved the subject (reading), learning better to identify the main idea, summarizing texts. They also noticed that the evaluation of each unit was a reason for getting good score.

However, some other participants complained about too much exercise and teachers also admit that it was time consuming.

From my point of view, distance learning has more positive impact on reading skills. This is because the students, during online study, mostly get information by reading. It makes them to think and comprehend the text, as well as to enrich vocabulary. However, as some students may have difficulties studying remotely, negative aspects of distance learning on reading skills are also not neglected

Overall, distance learning has positive and negative aspects for both speaking and reading. I consider that both online and offline forms of education may be productive, this is due to the fact that the study mostly depends on students' aspiration. Nothing can prevent them from reaching remarkable achievements in the academic field.

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