

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**



TOPIC

“ANALYSIS OF THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND RESOURCES YOUNG ADULTS MUST HAVE FOR A SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH DISTANCE LEARNING”

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Table of contents

CONTENT	PAGE
Abstract.....	6
Introduction	7
Research Questions.....	8
Objectives	9
Statement of the problem	10
Importance of the research	11
Theoretical Framework	12
Motivation	16
Perseverance.....	21
Determination.....	24
Effective communication skills.....	26
Cognitive skills.....	29
Critical Thinking.....	30
Note making	37
IT Skills in DL	45
Research Methodology	48
Research techniques and Instruments	49
Subsidiary Questions Analysis.....	50
Recommendations	51
Conclusion.....	52
REFERENCES.....	54

Abstract

The most important aim of distance learning is to make education accessible to most people. In order to be able to perform the capacity of learning and build up knowledge the student must have an active and independent role, making decisions, acting over the contents that they are receiving, and generating new concepts based on them. It is known, however, that most students are not capable of performing such qualities in their learning practice, despite the learning genre. The general objective of this research is to classify the qualities that a distance learner must have in the English language acquisition process. Therefore, what exactly is distance learning? According to the Encyclopedia Britannica distance learning, which will now be referred to as DL also called e-learning or tele-learning, is a form of education, which involves a physical separation between the teacher and the student during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student *communication*. Since the student is the center of distance learning, what does it take for a student to be successful with this modality? It is a must for any student that decides to try distance learning to possess certain abilities that are the foundation of distance education, like autonomy, self-management, self-monitoring and self-motivation which is crucial. A student that decides to take the challenge to learn in this fashion, has to really want it and has to be aware that he's going to make more efforts than what is usually done in regular learning.

Key words: Distance education, Motivation, Autonomy, Cognitive skills, Perseverance, Information Technology skills (Which from now on will be referred to as IT Skills).

Introduction

Nowadays, computers and the Internet have become an integral part of many aspects of life. Education is not an exception. New media provides new means for people to interact, create dialogues, and share information and have generated new means for learning, including distance education. Distance education has become increasingly appealing in recent years. For that reason, the present research is “ANALYSIS OF THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND RESOURCES YOUNG ADULTS MUST HAVE FOR A SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH DISTANCE LEARNING”. The aims are to classify and analyze the qualities that a distance learner must have in the English language acquisition process and confirm the importance of IT Skills.

According to the “Handbook of Distance Education” there is not really a huge difference between the qualities a learner should have to be good, either at a distance or face to face, yet it is important to review what makes the difference and how it can help a student to complete his or her course with success. This research presents, the following qualities a learner must have, which are autonomy, motivation, perseverance, determination, effective communication skills, cognitive skills, and IT Skills.

The research approach used for this investigation is qualitative, that involved the recollection of different opinions and experiences of various authors. The type of research is bibliographical.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

- What are the qualities that a distance learner must have in the English language acquisition process?

Subsidiary Questions

- How do these characteristics affect the learner studying English at a distance?
- Why are IT skills important to succeed in distance learning?

Objectives

General objective:

- To research the qualities and skills that a distance learner must develop in order to succeed in learning English.

Specific objectives:

- To list the essential qualities that a distance learner should have.
- To analyze the characteristics and their effect on the learner.
- To confirm the importance of IT skills to succeed in distance learning.

Statement of the problem

In March 2020, the world was affected by the COVID-19 pandemics which forced every country to take drastic measures to prevent contagion, and El Salvador was not an exception. Some of these initiatives impacted different areas of society like public services, work and principally education. These changes represent a challenge for Salvadorean students in general and also for foreign language learners because they were not prepared. So far, many learners are trying to adapt to the new modality, but they encounter several difficulties like not knowing how to use the new technologies, and not being able to work academically without a teacher. That is why they need to know what the necessary qualities or skills are to learn online and be successful.

By understanding these characteristics and mastering them, students will be able to persist and excel in their studies. Their learning process will be facilitated and they will get the most out of this new option. If they do not have these qualities in mind, they will feel frustrated to the point of abandoning their courses.

The aim of this study is to propose what are the essential qualities that will help students to avoid trouble studying at a distance and to achieve their goals. Describing how these qualities and knowledge can simplify the learning process, the research will help learners, who are reluctant to opt for online learning or any kind of distance education, to pursue their objectives, especially in a situation where they have no choice.

Importance of the research

The world is changing at a very rapid pace and so are teaching methods. Teachers and students must adapt to these modifications, especially when they are related to technology and the use of internet. With the popularity that distance education has gained in recent years, it is essential and necessary for both, learners and instructors to understand the qualities and skills they should have.

Being a good student is not simply attending classes and taking notes, it takes dedication and engagement. This task has now become more challenging with the emergence of online learning since students are most of time by themselves and need to motivate themselves as teachers are not there to supervise directly their progress.

This work will focus on the qualities of the student. These qualities are autonomy, motivation, perseverance/resilience, determination, effective communication skills, cognitive skills, and IT skills. Many of these attributes are not really hard to acquire, in fact some of them are the same that a student attending in-person courses should have too, but, for online learners, it takes a bit of more motivation and effort. Online students have to be more independent and self-conscious.

It is very important for students to be aware about their learning and to know how to master these indispensable qualities, previously mentioned. Since these characteristics will make the student's learning process easier and they will help them to achieve their goals.

Theoretical Framework

Distance education might seem to be a product of modern information technology, such as computers and the Internet, however, according to K. C. Harper, K. Chen, and D. C. Yen, the modern version is a reintroduction of an older method of education in a new form, rather than a newly created one (K. C. Harper et al., 2004). The origin of distance education can be traced back to the early 1700s.

Correspondence courses were established both in America and Great Britain. In the late 1800s, at the University of Chicago, the first major correspondence program in the United States was established in which the teacher and learner were at different locations. Before that time, particularly in preindustrial Europe, education was available in providing course materials, assignments, notes, tests, and feedback through the postal service. In 1962, the decision that the University of South Africa would become a distance-teaching university brought about a fundamental change in the way distance education was practiced in much of the world. Another landmark was the founding, in 1971 of the Open University of the United Kingdom, a degree giving distance-teaching university offering full degree programs, sophisticated courses, and the innovative use of media (Holmberg, 1986). The Open University brought heightened prestige to distance education and spurred the establishment of similar institutions in industrial nations such as West Germany, Japan, and Canada, as well as in such lesser-developed nations as Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Distance education was integrated with the radio and television when these two forms of mass communication were invented at the beginning of the 20th century. Between 1980 and 1990, pre-recorded video and cassette recordings were used heavily in distance education. It was not until the 1990s when computers became less expensive and accessible to large numbers of people and the internet transformed distance education into the version with which we are familiar today (K. C. Harper et al., 2004).

Distance learning has usually been intended to serve individuals who cannot pursue educational goals in traditional classroom settings. In 1999-2000, over 16,539,000 enrollments in distance learning were recorded in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). This enrollment figure includes only those courses taken for credit in higher education programs and excludes correspondence courses. The number of student enrollments and total online certificate and degree programs was expected to continue to increase as technology became further embedded in the foundations of society.

What is distance learning?

Normally, when we think about distance learning, the first thing that comes to our mind is taking online courses or studying through any sort of technologic device, which nowadays is a reality, but we tend to ignore that this method started as correspondence learning which was the first and only form of distance education for many generations and it had an impact especially at a college level. Through the years this correspondence method was replaced by newer technologies and now they have completely replaced it. Of course, this program was more developed in countries like the United States, Canada and Australia, but it did make it to our country as well, although, according to Nelson Martinez it is still an unexplored terrain or it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Distance education or distance learning is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy, technology, and instructional system designs that are effectively incorporated in delivering education to students who are not physically “on site” to receive their education. <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/distance-education/7981>

There are three main components to this definition. First is the concept that distance education is institutionally based. This is what differentiates distance education from self-study. While the institution referred to in this definition could be a traditional education school or college, increasingly there are emerging non-traditional

institutions that offer education to students at a distance. Businesses, companies, and corporations are offering instruction at a distance. Many educators and trainers are advocating the accreditation of institutions that offer distance education to add credibility, and, improve quality.

The second component of the definition is the separation of the teacher and student. Most often, separation is thought of in geographic terms: teachers are in one location and students in another.

The third component implied by the definition is the separation of teachers and students in time. Asynchronous distance education means that instruction is offered and students access it at separate times, or any time it is convenient to them.

Distance education has experienced dramatic growth both nationally and internationally since the early 1980s. It has evolved from early correspondence education using primarily print based materials into a worldwide movement using various technologies.

The goals of distance education, as an alternative to traditional education, have been to offer degree granting programs, to battle illiteracy in developing countries, to provide training opportunities for economic growth, and to offer curriculum enrichment in non-traditional educational settings. A variety of technologies have been used as delivery systems to facilitate this learning at a distance. Distance education, structured learning in which the student and instructor are separated by place, and sometimes by time is currently the fastest growing form of domestic and international education.

The benefits of distance education are huge and real. Students who cannot attend regular on-campus courses for any reason can now receive education. Technology may be driving the rapid rise in popularity of distance education, but it is the well-designed instructional situation which allows the learner to interact with the

technology in the construction of knowledge. It is the effective interaction of instructor, student and delivery system that grants distance education its prominence within the educational community. Distance education can offer the opportunity for a research-based practice, technological instruction, and creating a successful educational environment.

Main attributes and skills needed to achieve success during the learning process

Motivation

Motivation can also be a key issue. When students have less active interaction, their motivation has to come from within. Some students are not able to be self-motivated and are, therefore, less successful in their online classes (Bambara et al., 2009). Motivation comes as much from the support of other students as from within (Berge, 1996). Students want to interact, be a part of a learning community, and get to know each other in the online class much as they would in a traditional class (MacDonald & Thompson, 2005; Stodel et al., 2006). Students who have the opportunity to interact with other students are better able to make sense of what they are learning. Because learning takes place in a social context with shared understanding, students can develop critical judgment and solve problems (Berge, 1996). On the other hand, students must do more than converse; instead, they must demonstrate their knowledge by discussing the curriculum and material in an intelligent and thoughtful manner (Smith & Winking-Diaz, 2004).

The field of educational communications and technology has tended to focus on the factors that contribute to well-designed instruction. The assumption has been that well-designed instruction will result in a motivated learner. In reality, studies have shown that high-quality, well-designed instruction does increase learning and improve performance when students successfully complete their coursework (Keller 1983).

Keller proposes that well-designed instruction increases learning and performance when the learner is motivated to complete the instruction. The current study suggests that when instruction is consistent with learner preferences, then instruction matches learner values. Matching instruction with learner preferences and values results in greater effort and satisfaction.

While distance learning cannot replace the traditional classroom, it appeals to a growing number of students for a variety of reasons including convenience, and the ability to study by themselves (Pallof & Pratt, 2007). While many students embrace the courses for their benefits, educators and others express concerns about the experiences of those students and their levels of satisfaction with the courses.

Understanding the differences in student satisfaction could greatly enhance the ability of university administrators to make informed decisions relative to distance learning program improvements. The additional focus on distance learning students' satisfaction with technology and administrative services was also anticipated to be valuable in arriving at improvements and modifications in course content and delivery methodology and as well as in improving administrative services. Gay (2000) has stated that causal comparative studies identify relationships that may lead to experimental studies. Results of this study may provide the basis or incentive to conduct further studies into the relationship of student satisfaction in distance learning and traditional classrooms.

All learning requires a degree of motivation, self-discipline, and independence from of the learner, but these aspects are arguably more pertinent in the case of distance learning, where the student is largely self-directed and unsupervised, and expected to be more autonomous.

Autonomy

Autonomy is a fundamental skill in any learner in both distance and face to face courses, as in the two genres the challenge of discovering new learning models may be found – a challenge that concerns institutions, teachers and learners. Teaching how to learn is not only being in a classroom, but also changing what is done there. In this context it is crystal clear the necessity of creating individuals capable of reining their own learning. But how might this be done? This need is not a privilege of DL, but of any course willing to graduate qualified practitioners and citizens. Silva (2004,

p.2) shows the need of developing a pedagogical practice which focus on more than simply acquiring information. Galeffi (apud Silva, 2004) says that "there is a necessity of investing on a humanistic education of autonomous and inventive individuals".

According to Silva, this role involves factors such as acquiring critical, creative and participative thinking. It demands a kind of learning which insures mastering concepts, comprehending the framework beyond learning which lies on a global view of culture as well as theoretical base to analyze and interpret reality.

Moreover, it is essential to set up an educational practice that attaches theory to implementation in social, political and cultural contexts. It is noticed in the majority of students attending these classes a feeling of being lost, having no idea of what to do or how to develop projects they are asked to do. They seem not to know why they have to attend that course. The fact of being physically present in a classroom combined with deadlines and teachers' demands usually leads them to get over these feelings and kickoff the development of their autonomy as learners. As reported by Arcúrio (2008, p.2) in distance learning, the learner has to have already acquired study habits and routines in order to master his own learning.

A number of researchers have tried to define learner autonomy, resulting in inter-related definitions (Broad, 2006; Macaskill & Denovan, 2011). According to Betts (2004), the autonomous learner is an independent and life-long learner, while Benson (2001) sees learning autonomy as the learners' ability to assume control of their own learning. According to Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), the learners themselves are in charge of setting the goal, choosing methods, materials as well as tasks and finally selecting criteria for evaluation. Holec (1981) also defines autonomy as the learners' ability to take charge of their own learning. However, Little (1995) highlights the fact that learning autonomy does not imply a lack of support from the tutor's part, but it is the basis of a cooperation between learner and tutor. It

also implies the perpetual encouragement offered to learners by their tutor, and therefore a state of interdependence between them.

Autonomy is something that takes place inside “creative solitude”. Besides independence, being autonomous requires self-determination and the capacity of making decisions as well as regulating the learning process. “Autonomy is the responsibility of being in charge of one’s own learning.” (Andrade, 2003) It is known, however, that few students have such ability, as they have never been asked to do so. “Therefore, autonomy must be taught and conquered.” (Nicolaidis & Fernandes, 2001, apud Andrade, 2003). If we want an autonomous student, we need an autonomous teacher beforehand.

However, the teacher, during his experience as a former student and his instructional training is taught to centralize, make the decisions and be in control of the classroom. The students get used to a passive learning, with contents presented merely to be reproduced. Very often this student resists when producing and building up knowledge are expected from him. A clear example of such attitude may be noticed in foreign language teaching (FLT), in which “autonomy grew stronger with the development of the communicative approach, once it has changed the learner’s role, making him responsible for his own learning, decentralizing the teacher’s role” (Andrade, 2003).

Learner autonomy is contingent upon dialogue and structure involving the learners’ ability to control their own learning and manage it in a self-reliant way by creating learning plan, by finding resources that support study and by self-evaluating. Full autonomy permits the determination of goals and their accomplishment by learners and allows them to determine how much to learn. On the other hand, the decision-making power of the learner is restricted when there is a lack of autonomy. Oxford’s (2008) view regarding autonomy is quite similar to Moore’s on the grounds that, in a thoroughly autonomous learning environment, learners make decisions involving both planning and implementation. When the level of learner autonomy is lower,

learners make considerably fewer decisions linked to implementation. Nevertheless, according to Little (1995) and Moore (1997; 2007), learners' autonomy does not mean that they do not need the tutor's support. On the contrary, both researchers emphasize the tutor's supportive, encouraging and motivating role. This is also highlighted by other researchers (Andrade & Bunker, 2009; Fanariti & Spanaka, 2010; Murphy, 2007; Santos & Camara, 2010; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). In a distance learning course, the student's interaction with the tutor and the learning material reflects dialogue (Anderson, 2007; White, 2003).

Several researchers refer to learner autonomy as the willingness of learners to be active, take control and supervise their own learning as well as to take risks. Furthermore, they refer to learner autonomy as the learners' ability to set goals, to act independently, and, make decisions about choosing materials, methods and tasks. Finally, as their ability to organize and carry out a chosen task, to learn in terms of self-awareness and select the criteria for evaluation (Holec, 1981; Hurd, 2005; White, 2003). According to Vanijdee (2003) a wider conceptualization of learner autonomy involves the learners' capacity and attitudes, permitting them to take responsibility for the learning process, while Hurd, Beaven, and Ortega (2001) suggest that learner autonomy involves strategic competences, choice-making and decision-making abilities, as well as metacognition.

In a distance learning context, it is essential that the students have acquired study strategies and habits that will enable them to define the learning steps and master their own learning. At the same time, tutors should be in charge of guiding, supporting and encouraging students to build knowledge in order to meet the demands of the distance education course, as well as to develop learner autonomy so that learners will be able to achieve their goals. The distance education provider is the one in charge of defining the parameters that will contribute to the students' learning progress (Santos & Camara, 2010).

In the context of distance learning, building a sense of community is of great significance both from the tutor's and the students' part. Conrad (2005) refers to the tutor's important role in encouraging interaction and communication among students in order to foster the sense of community in such courses. What is more, Conrad highlights the significant role of a friendly, reliable and immediate tutor in creating a sense of community in distance learning courses.

Furthermore, face-to-face interaction is a valuable element, in spite of the robustness of the students' online communication, on the grounds that it contributes to a healthy learning community. Kassandrinou, Angelaki, and Mavroidis (2014) also stress the tutors' essential role as communication and interaction facilitators, since they are supposed to continuously foster, encourage and facilitate interaction and communication among students. Face-to-face tutorials are a great opportunity for the group of learners to exchange ideas, discuss the content of the course and raise concerns related to it (Vassala & Andreadou, 2010). According to Angelaki and Mavroidis (2013) quality tutor-student and student-student communication, leads students to experience positive emotions such as excitement, satisfaction and relief, which help them accomplish their learning goals. Moore (2007) refers to students with high levels of autonomy who search for courses which do not emphasize on dialogue and structure, in order to define and enhance their learning process. Learner autonomy is not acquired readily. It requires autonomous tutors ready to negotiate their personal goals in relation to the learners' goals and who will gradually train and lead learners to take responsibility of their own studies (Little, 1995).

Perseverance

Another key characteristic of a successful distance learner is *Perseverance* which brings to our mind a very similar word often mistaken as a synonym, *persistence*. The question that should be posed is why is *perseverance* and not *persistence* a significant quality? And also, how do these attribute help students achieve their

objectives? Furthermore, there are other aspects can be analyzed like what encourages perseverance.

It is very interesting that even though many people think they are equivalents, actually Terry Magelakis, Student Success Advisor, describes how these concepts have a very particular nuance, which leads to confusing them regularly. He explains that *they have very similar meanings when it comes to success*. He adds that *both are about the choice of continuing and committing to our goals in spite of the lack of success and the difficulties a person has to face*. Where they vary is actually the result of the action since persistence is just about enduring, but not necessarily learning from this experience, but perseverance on the other hand is actually about overcoming the difficulties and seeing considerable changes after this effort. In Magelakis words *persistence is a choice, perseverance means surviving the toughest conditions and coming out better on the other side*.

Now that the importance of perseverance is clear we have to understand how does it help the learner to succeed. First, of all, it is important to emphasize the difficulties that many students across the globe are facing after the overnight transition to distance learning, and also any other difficulties that students in the past may have encountered.

According to Carolyn Hart some of the obstacles or barriers that may affect online learning are:

- **Auditory learning style:** Hart states that lacking this skill, in which students learn best by listening may affect their progress. So online learning could represent a real challenge to learners that do not find lectures or discussions interesting or have lots of trouble adapting to online classes where most of the time, they just have to listen.
- **Basic computer skills:** Having basic computer skills does not necessarily mean that a student will be more successful than a student that has a limited capacity with informatics. Hart studied authors Harrell and Bower (2011) and they determined that sometimes students may comprehend how to properly use a technological device, but this would interfere with their since they may

get distracted by the use of internet or other tasks, they can perform parallelly with their online courses.

- **Difficulty in accessing resources:** it is well known that in underdeveloped countries, like El Salvador, not everyone is on the same boat and accessing technological resources is harder for some than it is for others. Many people don't have access to a computer or cellphones which are indispensable for virtual learning, so basically it could be inferred that online learning is only for people who can afford the technological devices or pay internet services.
- **Isolation and decreased engagement:** some learners may need social contact which may influence their results. According to Bunn, there are two types of isolation, one is from the faculty and the other is from fellow students which may be harmful for students in need of contact with others to learn better
- **Personal life Barriers:** besides all the barriers mentioned above, there are also personal issues that may be preventing them to persevere. These issues could be of different nature: familiar, work (for students that have to work) and also social problems may show up.
- **Poor communication:** is one of the barriers that affects persistence the most. Normally in online learning communication is not very direct and teachers may take longer to give feedback and this can discourage some learners.

Carolyn Hart has also listed some aspects that can help understand what kind of support a person needs in order to succeed and persevere.

- **A sense of belonging to a community:** if students are able to socialize with their peers, it would be easier for them to adapt and continue the program until the end.
- **Support:** students need to feel supported by their family and friends. This is very important since nowadays, most of online students are at home and they need their close relatives and circle of intimates to understand that studying online demands time and effort.

- **Interaction:** this is a key factor for online students to persevere since when they receive feedback and are able to communicate with their teacher, it fuels their motivation to continue working.

The group concludes that perseverance is crucial since many people confuse it with persistence and although they are very similar in meaning, there's a difference that actually stands out and is very relevant. Perseverance englobes not only enduring, but also learning, overcoming difficulties. A student that is able to successfully go through different stages is more capable of performing since they are not at the same stage they were at the beginning.

Determination

Determination encloses three important aspects of motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This was determined by Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan in the book "Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior", published in the mid-1980s. Recently, Susan Epps, associate professor of Allied Health Sciences, and Alison Barton, associate professor of Teaching and Learning, both at East Tennessee State University, are studying this theory and the way it can be applied to help students succeed in online distance learning. These three aspects are explained in detail hereunder:

- **Autonomy**

Even though autonomy can be associated with independence, when it comes to learning it is more focused on taking control over one's own life or learning in this case. In this aspect, both parties have an important role to play, on one side the teacher has to be able to create a sense of autonomy on their students, but then on the other hand, students have to be able to be aware of their learning and not only be able to make decisions, but also be able to accept the results and observe how these are influencing their progress.

How is a teacher able to create autonomy? In the case of Barton, she encourages a lot online discussion where students participate actively. Since her students are pre-

service teachers, she wants to be able to decide on the content they will be teaching in their classes.

Epps, on the other hand, focuses more on format. She gives choices to her students, and when they have to present a topic, she lets them decide the way they are going to present the information, whether is going to be a document or maybe a power point presentation. Students develop autonomy by feeling that the decision they make is meaningful.

Also, Barton gives them choices when it comes to evaluations, she asks them about the number of exams they will have in a course, and also which one are going to be taken into consideration for the final evaluation.

- **Competence**

Although the meaning of competence may not be clear or easy to describe in simple words, it is a characteristic of motivation that certainly most learners, and especially online learners should possess. According to the article published by Meghan Naxer on June 10th, 2019 in the Ecampus Course Development and Training, based on Deci and Ryan's theory, competence is often associated with *receiving positive feedback*, but it is much more than that. It is the feeling of a student that is being able to overcome challenges. This means that the students need to feel that they are mastering the subject they are studying, even though it may be difficult at times, and that even if they have to struggle, in the end they are able to succeed.

They may feel incompetent or discouraged, when they are overwhelmed by the number of topics to study. Also, when they don't have a clear vision of what they will achieve by studying a certain course. Here's where the teacher has to play a part in their progress, since they could simplify the content of a course and that way students would feel motivated to learn.

- **Relatedness**

This characteristic is focused on the rapport that the student can build with their *instructor and classmates*. The teacher has to be able to create confidence in their

students by providing prompt feedback and encouraging participation during each session.

To encourage students to feel more engaged in the course they have enrolled to, Barton recommends the teachers to upload videos explaining a certain topic, that way the students become acquainted with them. Teachers can also promote communication between students by engaging them in forum discussions.

The group considers “determination” an indispensable skill, because when students have motivation to succeed and really want to achieve their goals, they can do impressive feats. For instance, the case of Alexander Contreras, a student from El Salvador who went viral last year because he climbed up the treetop of a Guava tree in his backyard in order to catch internet signal. Fortunately, the images caught the attention of the public eye and he received useful material for his online classes. This example demonstrates that the only barriers that a person has are on his or her mind, and that there are no excuses if the person has the resources and the motivation in order to excel in what he or she does.

Effective communication skills

Communicating with students in an online environment requires a little more thought and planning than communicating with students in a face-to-face context due to the limitations that body language may encounter in DL. In a face-to-face class, using body language, and facial expression can help the teacher to communicate and get the message across to the student. Awareness of limitations to communication capabilities within online environments will help to determine how to develop timely and relevant communication and how to effectively communicate with online students. To determine what would be considered timely and relevant communication in online classes, the first need is to decide why and what needs to be transmitted to students.

There are different tools to communicate in the online classroom. Some of them include: discussion boards in platforms, blogs, video conferencing tools, and

emailing. These types of online communication are: synchronous and asynchronous.

According to Milica Vukadin (2019) the Synchronous communication happens during the live lesson, where teachers can communicate with students directly, via a video conferencing app, and the Asynchronous communication is when they use e-mails or any kind of messaging service and answer when they see the message.

Milica Vukadin (2019) classifies the six essential communication skills for both students and teachers in the distance learning in this way:

1. Listening

Listening has always been the most important aspect of communication.

2. Friendliness

Friendliness is still important, even in distance learning.

3. Open-mindedness

The quality of being willing to consider ideas and opinions that are new to one's own.

4. Feedback

The information shared with students during the live lesson is probably the most important part of communication. Effective feedback will also have a positive impact not only on their learning but also on their mental wellbeing.

5. Confidence

A feeling of self-assurance.

6. Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal cues are essential if the teacher is talking, and the student's microphones are muted.

Those essential skills are based in the motivation that each student has at the moment they take their online classes.

Communication represents a fundamental step of learning, and it is the most important part of any of these processes. The accent on these skills in a DL classroom is even greater because it can have a great impact on the overall success of the student's progress.

Cognitive skills

To be a successful student in DL, it does not only involve the aptitude, but also the cognitive skills which are a mental process that requires learners to actively construct new knowledge, synthesize information, and gain comprehension.

Cognitive skills are brain-based abilities the students need to carry out any task from the simplest to the most complex. They have to do with mechanics of how they learn, remember, problem-solve, and pay attention, rather than any actual knowledge.

According to the article “What are cognitive abilities and skills, and can we boost them?” from Sharpbrains.com, there are some mental functions that are considered cognitive skills:

- Perception
Recognition and interpretation stimuli: smell, touch, hearing.
- Attention
Ability to sustain concentration on a particular object, action, or thought, and ability to manage competing demands in the students’ environment
- Memory
Short-term/working memory (limited storage), and long-term memory (unlimited storage)
- Motor skills
The ability to mobilize the muscles and body, and ability to manipulate objects
- Language
Skills allowing us to translate sounds into words and generate verbal output.
- Visual and spatial processing
Ability to process incoming visual stimuli to understand spatial relationships between objects, and to visualize images and scenarios.
- Executive functions
Abilities to goal-oriented behavior, such as the ability to plan, and execute a goal. These include:

- Flexibility: the capacity for quickly switching to the appropriate mental mode.
- Theory of mind: insight into other people's inner world, their plans, their likes and dislikes.
- Anticipation: prediction based on pattern recognition.
- Problem-solving: defining the problem in the right way to then generate solutions and pick up the right one.
- Decision making: the ability to make decisions based on problem-solving, on incomplete information and on emotions.
- Working memory: The capacity to hold and manipulated information "on-line" in real time.
- Emotional self-regulation: the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions for good performance.
- Inhibition: the ability to withstand distraction, and internal urges.

Each of the cognitive skills plays an important part in processing new information. That means if even one of these skills is weak, no matter what is being studied, grasping, retaining, or using information is impacted. In fact, most learning struggles are caused by one or more weak cognitive skills. The researches decided to explain in a detailed form the critical thinking skill, the note- making skills and the way the students can improve those skills so that they achieve their goals in the learning language acquisition.

Critical Thinking

According to "Bassham, G., Irwin, W., Nardone, H., and Wallace, J.M, (2011)" in their book *Critical Thinking A student's introduction*. Critical thinking is the general term given to a wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions needed to identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments and truth claims; to discover and overcome personal perceptions and biases to formulate and present concerning reasons in support conclusions and to make reasonable, intelligent decisions about what to believe and what to do. Critical thinking is beneficial for many reasons, it can

help students do better in school by improving their ability to understand, construct, and criticize arguments, think creatively and communicate their ideas clearly and effectively.

As the authors remark critical thinking is governed by clear intellectual standards. Among the most important of these intellectual are clarity, precision, accuracy, consistency, logical correctness, and fairness. will look briefly at each of these important standards:

- **Clarity**

The process of understanding clearly what a teacher is saying so that students can effectively evaluate the teacher's explanation.

- **Precision**

The condition of being precise. Students need an extraordinary commitment to precision and highly trained observation. They must have precise answers to precise questions about a lecture or a given test.

- **Accuracy**

No matter how brilliant students may be. They are almost assured to make bad decisions, if the decision is based on false information, it is truly necessary that students have a passion for being accurate.

- **Consistency**

Maintaining the same principles and habits. In others words, consistency is the ability to preserve the same behavior, aptitudes or qualities.

- **Logical correctness**

Is the ability that a student has to evaluate arguments in a reasonable fashion, meaning that they are able to discern what is correct or appropriate from what is false.

- **Fairness**

Critical thinking demands thinking be fair. It means open-minded, impartial, and free of distorting preconceptions.

The benefits of critical thinking in the classroom

To succeed in school, the students must be able to understand the materials they are studying. To have critical thinking can significantly improve the ability to understand the arguments and issues discussed in the school textbooks and classes.

Bassham, G., Irwin, W., Nardone, H., and Wallace, J.M, (2011) stated the following: In addition, critical thinking can help you critically evaluate what you are learning in class. During the learning process, teachers will often ask students to discuss “critically” an article from the book. Critical thinking teaches a wide range of strategies and skills that can greatly improve the student’s ability to engage in such critical evaluations.

The students will also be asked to develop the own arguments on particular topics or issues. In an American Government class, for example, students might be asked to write a paper addressing the issue of whether Congress has gone too far in restricting presidential war powers. To write such a paper successfully, they must do more than simply find and assess relevant arguments and information. Students must also be able to marshal arguments and evidence in a way that convincingly supports the point of view. The systematic training provided in a course in critical thinking can greatly improve that skill as well.

According to Stella Cottrell (2013) “The Study Skills Handbook”. It is necessary that students ask critical questions so that they improve the cognitive skills. These questions are:

- Why?
- How far?
- How much?
- How often?
- To what extent?
- How do we know this is true?
- How reliable is this source?

- What do we not know about this?
- Which is preferable?
- For what reasons?

In the cognitive process of synthesizing information, and gaining comprehension to construct new knowledge, the students must think in a critical way when they are in reading, writing, and listening activities. Cottrell explains the following process in order to improve these skills:

1. Critical thinking when reading

- Identifying the line of reasoning in the text

In some activities, students are required to read, and the texts can include an argument. In academic writing an argument is a line of reasoning, a point of view, a position that is being defended or a case that is being made. In reading activities students need to keep asking themselves: "Which point of view this writer wants me to accept? What reasons does she or he present to encourage me to accept this?"

- Critically evaluating the line of reasoning

An argument can be critically evaluated in terms of whether it contains relevant and sufficient reasons, logical progression or false promises. When examining the line of reasoning, the students need to consider if the reasons given by the writer are relevant and whether they support" (Cottrell, 2013, p.190)

The following steps of identifying the line of reasoning are:

- Questioning surface appearances and checking for hidden assumptions or agendas
- Identifying evidence in the text
- Evaluating the evidence according to valid criteria
- Identifying the writer's conclusions
- Deciding whether the evidence given supports such conclusions.

Thinking in a critical way helps students to be successful in their reading assignment and tests, it includes critical analysis of the work of their classmates, in other words, a peer-evaluation.

2. Critical thinking when writing

Writing in 2013, Stella Cottrell argued when students write they include most of the elements of critical thinking that they would use when reading.

Critical thinking when writing involves comparable processes:

- Being clear on the position on the issue, including hypotheses and/or conclusions: Students' writing is often weakened because their thinking is not clear before they start to write their final draft.
- Constructing a clear line of reasoning – an 'argument' leading to the conclusion: It is not unusual for students to hand in work which shows that although they have done the necessary reading and even given their work considerable thought, they are not sure of their conclusions. The whole of the piece of writing should lead to its conclusions: if these are vague, understated or poorly formulated, all of the writing loses its force.
- Presenting evidence to support the reasoning: construct a clear line of reasoning. If the conclusions are clear, the argument or line of reasoning is likely to be clear also.

The conclusion gives the students a goal at which to shoot. Keep the writing focused, rather than rambling. Bear in mind four guidelines:

- a) Early drafts help to elaborate and refine thinking. The final version should state the position clearly.
- b) Create a writing plan that sets out reasons, examples, and evidence in the most logical order.
- c) Consider how best to link up the material, so that the piece of writing is not just a list of facts but, an organized and well-developed argument.

- d) Keep the argument clear: including too much detail can obscure it. Draw together the best material and ideas, selecting carefully. Shape these to support the argument. Use paragraphing, link words, and phrasing to signpost points clearly.
- Analyzing issues from multiple perspectives, weighing up the evidence for each issue. The best answers identify how and why various experts agree or disagree on an issue, and demonstrate how the evidence supports, or does not support, their positions. This means considering strengths, weaknesses, and grey areas. The answer is seldom a straightforward one of right or wrong. Usually there are many contradictory pieces of evidence to weigh up and evaluate against each other. The final position or conclusions may be a synthesis of these.
 - Writing in a critical, analytical style, rather than in a descriptive, personal or journalistic style.
 - Reading and analyzing the own work critically.

The tutors or examiners will take a critical reading approach when marking the student's work. Before handing in an assignment, students must analyze it critically as they would other material they read. They will be a fierce critic of the own work so that they can spot weaknesses and address them, and ensure that students are clear about the strengths of their own argument.

3. Critical thinking when listening

Critical thinking when listening involves the same awareness as when reading, plus:

- Checking for consistency in what the speakers are saying - do the speakers appear to contradict themselves; and if so, what is going on beneath that contradiction?
- Checking that body language, eye contact, and speed and tone of voice are consistent, or 'congruent', with what is being said: do the speakers look and sound as though they believe in what they are saying?

Besides the previous advice, it is also recommendable to take into consideration the following suggestions when listening to audio material.

- Prepare in advance
Read or browse a reputable text before listening. If the students are already informed about the subject, it is easier to identify flaws in the arguments or evidence.
- Identify the thread
Focus on the line of reasoning, or argument, just as students would do when reading. This will help students avoid being distracted by interesting or emotive details and anecdotes.
- Question closely what you hear
Even if it sounds plausible or it is your lecturers speaking. Take nothing at face value.
- Evaluate the evidence
Identify the evidence used to support the argument. Apply the same critical approaches as when reading.

In spite of the student being able to develop critical thinking, it is important to take into account some of the barriers that a learner may encounter when analyzing documents:

- Lack of relevant background information
- Poor reading skills
- Egocentrism (self-centered thinking)
- Socio-centrism (group-centered thinking)
- Narrow- mindedness
- Closed-mindedness
- Stereotyping
- Short-term thinking
- Selective memory
- Overpowering emotions

- Fear of change
- Unwarranted assumptions

Note making

Before starting to explain what note-making is, it is necessary to ask the next question. Is note making a useful activity? It is, depending on the students' commitment. When students are doing a task about a lecture, the note making activity is really useful because they need to make a list of words that they do not know in order to look in the dictionary for their meaning.

Defining note-making

In an article entitled "Note-making, Student Learning Advisory Service", of the University of Kent, expresses the answers to: Why make notes?

- Notes are a permanent record of information that will help students prepare for seminars, presentations, assignments and examinations.
- Note-making helps them to concentrate on what they are reading, watching or hearing; it helps them to understand new information and new ideas; noting things down in their own words help to place them in the long-term memory.
- Effective note-making is a key academic skill; it is invaluable in helping students avoid plagiarism and study more efficiently.

As stated in the article, it is very important that students make notes in order to remember the information at the moment when they are studying. It is useful to make notes when students have an assignment about a lecture, making notes improves their memory, as well as, give students confidence in order to be an autodidactic.

It is essential to make a distinction between the definitions: note-making and note-taking, so that students do not confuse them. Note-taking is the process in which the students write down all the information that their teacher is explaining or when they are reading a lecture. This information can be useful or unnecessary. On the contrary, note-making is an active process in which students write down the

information that they think is essential and useful. It can be said that it involves a cognitive process of selecting the right words or phrases which are relevant. In other words, note-making involves an analysis of the information.

Referring to note-making and note-taking, an article from Academic Skill specialists of the Cardiff Metropolitan University explains why it is better to practice note-making rather than note-taking. Their arguments are:

- Active process: note-making is an active process that involves thought and the application of skills associated with criticality.
- Criticality: note-making provides opportunities for practicing the skills associated with critical thinking.
- Relevance and usefulness: by selecting information according to its usefulness, you will inevitably produce notes that are more relevant, meaningful, and easier to use.
- Reflection: as we will see, practicing note-making also gives them the opportunity to reflect on the breadth of the knowledge. Just as students might make a note of relevant information, they can also keep a record of any ideas or concepts that require further investigation.
- Deep-level learning: by implementing a more critical approach to making notes, the learning will be more in-depth and permanent. In other words, the students will remember more for longer periods of time.

Approaches to note-making

There are a number of ways to make notes. It's up to the students which method they use – different people will have different ways of learning, and so one method is not necessarily better than another. Remember, the student can adapt any of these approaches to suit your needs.

Post-it notes technique

This approach requires a printout or photocopy of a textbook or journal article. Students simply add post-it notes on the page at relevant points. The principal advantage to this method is that it encourages them to be selective; they can't cover an entire page with post-it because students won't be able to read it if they do so! (Adobe Reader allows to add post-its or annotations to pdf documents, a very useful alternative to using paper copies)

Factsheets

Perhaps more useful for revision purposes, factsheets encourage selective reading of a range of sources in order to pick out key points related to a topic. These points are normally presented succinctly on one side of a piece of A4 or A3 paper. Similar to mind-maps, factsheets offer opportunities to learn visually; they therefore promote deep-level learning.

Summary technique

Summarizing the content of a book chapter or journal article provides an effective way of practicing those higher order critical thinking skills, as well as gaining an insight into how an argument is constructed, developed and expressed. You can do this by using post-it notes, index cards, or even a blank piece of lined paper. Simply note down the key points – often reflecting the subject of each paragraph – on a separate post-it note, card, or line of the page. The advantage of this approach is that it encourages you to think carefully about the content of the work as you are summarizing it. Try to put as much of what you read into your own words as possible. By doing this, you will maximize the opportunity offered by this technique to develop those higher order skills.

Three-column approach

Perhaps the most useful of these techniques and the one you are most likely to use on a daily basis, the three-column approach offers a simple yet highly effective way of making notes. Divide up a piece of paper into three columns: (from L to R) major themes, notes on text, reflection. 'Notes on text' should be wider than the other two. Pick out key words related to the point you are making and add it in the left-hand column; provide supplementary notes in the middle column; and in the 'reflection' column, add any further notes or memos, such as reminders for you to look at a point again or compare it to another piece of information noted elsewhere.

Mind-maps

Referring to mind-maps, in the book entitled Buzan study skills handbook says that:

Mind-maps are a graphic, networked method of-storing, organizing and prioritizing information (usually on paper) using key or trigger words and images, each of which will 'snap on' specific memories and encourage new thoughts and ideas. Each of the memory triggers in a mind-map is a key to unlocking facts, ideas and information and, also, to releasing the true potential of the amazing mind.

The clue to the mind map's effectiveness lies in its dynamic shape and form. It is drawn in the shape and form of a brain cell and is designed to encourage the brain to work in a way that is fast, efficient, and in the style that it does naturally.

"Every time we look at the veins of a leaf or the branches of a tree we see nature's 'Mind Maps' echoing the shapes of brain cells and reflecting the way we ourselves are created and connected. Like us, the natural world is forever changing and regenerating, and has a communication structure that appears similar to our own. A Mind Map is a natural thinking tool that draws upon the inspiration and effectiveness of these natural structures". The group can infer from this that mind-maps are like trees and each branch is the essential information.

Mind-maps are particularly adaptive for reading, revising, note-taking and planning for exams efficiently. They are invaluable for gathering and ordering information, and for identifying the key trigger words and facts from:

- Reference, books, textbooks, primary and secondary source books.
- Lectures, tutorials, course notes, research material.
- From the brain.

They help students to manage information effectively, and increase the potential for personal success. Those students who use mind-maps usually report that they feel a sense of confidence, that their aims are achievable, and that they are on track for reaching their goals.

They are useful for those students who do not possess critical thinking skills because mind-maps help to improve them. It is most effective for those who possess the visual intelligence. The reason is that the mind-maps contain images and graphics, and this helps students to remember the information. Mind-maps establish connections between points and, it gives an overview of the topic in question.

According to Tony Buzan, (2012) in his book entitled “The Ultimate Book of Mind-maps”, he mentions that mind-maps can help students to:

- Plan
- Communicate
- Be more creative
- Save time
- Solve problems
- Concentrate
- Organize and clarify the thoughts
- Remember better
- Study faster and more efficiently
- See the ‘whole picture’

He adds that mind-maps are also useful for:

- Brainstorming - individually, and as a group.
- Summarizing information, and note-taking.
- Consolidating information from different research sources.
- Thinking through complex problems.
- Presenting information in a format that shows the overall structure of their subject.
- Studying, retaining and recall information.
- Promotes meaningful learning instead of memorization.

However, he explains that there are disadvantages about mind-maps, like:

- Cannot be digitally stored other than as a scanned document.
- Map size is limited.
- Preference of user for mind mapping software advantages.

Benefits of mind-maps for presentation and written tasks:

- They eliminate the stress and unhappiness caused by disorganization, fear of failure and “writer’s block”.
- They enormously reduce the time needed for preparation, structuring and completion of the presentation or writing task.
- They put the students in continuous control of the analytical and creative process.
- They result in more focused, organized and integrated presentation, essay, project or report.

7 steps to making a mind-map.

Tony Buzan suggests 7 steps for students to successfully create mind-maps and he states them as follows:

1. Start in the center of a blank page turned sideways. Why? Because starting in the center gives the brain freedom to spread out in all directions and to express itself more freely and naturally.
2. Use an image or picture for the central idea. Why? Because an image is worth a thousand words and helps students use their imagination. A central image is more interesting, keeps students focused, helps them concentrate, and gives the brain more of a buzz!
3. Use colors throughout. Why? Because colors are as exciting to the brain as are images. Color adds extra vibrancy and life to the mind-map, adds tremendous energy to the Creative Thinking, and is fun!
4. Connect the main branches to the central image and connect the second-and third-level branches to the first and second levels, etc. Why? Because the brain works by association. It likes to link two (or three, or four) things together. If students connect the branches, they will understand and remember a lot more easily. Connecting the main branches also create and establishes a basic structure or architecture for their thoughts. This is very similar to the way in which in nature a tree has connected branches that radiate from its central trunk. If there were little gaps between the trunk and its main branches or between those main branches and the smaller branches and twigs, nature wouldn't work quite so well! Without connection in the Mind Map, everything (especially their memory and learning!) falls apart. Connect!
5. Make the branches curved rather than straight-lined. Why? Because having nothing but straight lines is boring to the brain. Curved, organic branches, like the branches of trees, are far more attractive and riveting to the eye.
6. Use one key word per line. Why? Because single key words give the Mind Map more power and flexibility. Each single word or image is like a multiplier, generating its own special array of associations and connections. When

students use single key words, each one is freer and therefore, better able to spark off new ideas and new thoughts. Phrases or sentences tend to dampen this triggering effect. A mind-map with more key words in it is like a hand with all the finger joints working. A Mind-map with phrases or sentences is like a hand with all the fingers held in rigid splints!

7. Use images throughout. Why? Because each image, like the central image, is also worth a thousand words. So if you have only 10 images in your mind-map, it's already the equal of 10,000 words of notes!

Taking into advice about how to develop some of the cognitive skills, from an article entitled "Cognitive development: What is cognitive development "of Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. The author mentioned that those cognitive skills play a vital role in the student's overall development; as they include some of the brain's core functions. All this affect the quality of the learning performance, for this reason, teachers must encourage their students to:

- To think independently and develop their own ideas.
- To share ideas and thoughts with their classmates.
- To think about possibilities of the future.
- Include students in discussions about a variety of topics, issues, and current events.
- Help students in setting their goals.
- Compliment and praise students for well-thought-out decisions.
- Helps students in reviewing any poorly made decisions.

Cognitive skills are more than just learning information. It also involves synthesizing, organizing, analyzing, and processing the new information and taking advantages of the prior knowledge so that students think critically and make decisions.

IT Skills in DL

When students decide to study at distance, they are responsible for having enough computer skills, and access to technology to accomplish the tasks. Online teachers are not responsible for teaching these skills within the course. For that reason, in distance learning, it is necessary to possess the following skills.

- Knowledge of computer terminology, such as browser, operating system, application, software, files, documents, icon, etc.
- Understanding of basic computer hardware and software with the ability to perform computer operations, such as: Using keyboard and mouse; managing files and folders: save, name, copy, move, backup, rename, delete, check properties; Software installation, security, and virus protection; Knowledge of copying and pasting, spell-checking, saving files in different formats; Uploading and downloading attachments.
- Internet skills (connecting, accessing sites, using browsers).
- Ability to use online communication tools, such as email (create, send, receive, reply, print, send/receive attachments), discussion boards (read, search, post, reply, follow threads), chats, and messengers.
- Perform online research using various search engines and library databases.
- Create online accounts.
- Take online examinations

- Using software applications, such as Word, PowerPoint, Excel, email.

Video conferencing is a technology that provides a communication, designed for the exchange of information through real-time visual, auditory and verbal interaction with people who are geographically distant. Video conferencing allows you to share information, exchange points view, and display all types of documents, drawings, graphics, pictures, computer images, and videos, at the same time without having to move to the place where the other person is. Due to the containment situation because to the COVID-19 pandemic, in recent

months seen increased consumption of video calling applications for classes, telework, and personal use. The most widely used applications for video calls according to Alarco research group are: WhatsApp, skype, Microsoft teams, zoom and Google Meet. Also they express are the most complete since they allow the communication in real time by different means and allow group work with the applications that complement communication.

The team considers the following video conferencing apps the most useful in nowadays:

Google Meet

It is the video conferencing system designed by Google that integrates with GMail account. Some of the benefits to use it are: unlimited number of meetings, live captioning during meetings, compatible across devices, video and audio preview screen, adjustable layouts and screen settings, controls for meeting hosts, screen sharing with participants, messaging with participants, and integration with Google and Microsoft Office apps.

Zoom

It has become very popular, and offers the possibility of conducting video conferences, online seminars and live broadcasts to a large number of attendees. The audio is transmitted in high definition (HD) without cuts, ensuring a very professional image quality and a very fluid online experience for students, even if teachers share a video with them and their online classes are numerous. Students join the videoconference by clicking on a web link that teachers send them beforehand. With Zoom, instructors can share the screen of their PC, as well as share web links and files through the built-in Chat. It also allows them to record and share the session for their students to review at any time.

Microsoft Teams

It is a communication and collaboration platform that combines persistent chat capabilities, video conferencing, file storage, and integration with many other Microsoft 365 apps. Some of the benefits are: using the chat window in Teams to have quick conversations with colleagues, which makes that experience so much easier, reduces emails, also, students can create Word, Excel or PowerPoint documents in Teams, immediately share it and, stay connected, anytime, anywhere the Teams phone app, have immediate access to all the apps and documents, students can easily respond to chat and conversations, join meetings with one click.

All the above applications are completely free, students and teachers simply need a smartphone or a computer with internet access and can make use of them.

Research Methodology

Research approach: qualitative research

The team used a qualitative research approach to carry out the investigation. This approach involves the recollection of different opinions and experiences to understand and analyze the concepts of various authors in order to create new perspectives. It is focused on the social behavior of individuals.

Type of research: bibliographical research

This work is bibliographical. This type of research is used to describe the characteristics of an object of study. It collects data that are used to answer a wide range of what questions pertaining to a particular phenomenon.

Research design: Qualitative descriptive research

The main objective of this type of investigation is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with “What” rather than “How” or “why” something has happened. It involves the study of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories.

Research techniques and Instruments

Info analysis: The team made a list of all sources that support the content of this work by using the following criteria:

- Analyzing books, papers, internet articles.

Collection of information

Concerning the collection of information, the team carried it out by following these steps:

- Collecting information from books, journals, thesis, articles, and websites.
- Classifying the primary and secondary sources.
- Analyzing the information related to the topic.
- Processing the information.
- Obtaining the data through graphs and tables taken from previous studies.

Subsidiary Questions Analysis

1. What are the qualities that a distance learner must have in the English language acquisition process?

According to our research, the team chose the main qualities that distance learners of English must have to succeed in their studies. These characteristics and skills are: Motivation, Autonomy, Perseverance, Determination, Effective Communication Skills, Cognitive Skills and IT skills. The group considers that students should be motivated to gain discipline and independence in their learning. Autonomy is important for acquiring a critical, creative and participative thinking. Perseverance is necessary for students to overcome difficulties and learn from them to achieve their goals. Determination is the action that follows motivation and is essential to complete successfully their course.

In regards to skills, effective communication is indispensable in distance learning because teacher and student are not face to face. Cognitive skills are useful, even though they are complex, to help the student to be more critical and to analyze the information. IT skills are fundamental because if students do not possess them, distance learning is not possible.

2. How do these characteristics affect the learner studying English at a distance?

If students do not have any of the qualities or abilities, they will not be able to achieve their goals because they are the basis of a successful distance learner. In the case that students are not able to develop these mental skills, they will not be able to retain information appropriately, analyze it and then produce the language.

3. Why are IT skills important to succeed in distance learning?

IT skills are important because students are more responsible of their learning process. Learners have to possess already knowledge of technical skills in order to start online classes. Most of the time the acquisition of these skills has to be self-taught.

Recommendations

To the teacher:

- Teachers should be trained constantly with new updates in order for them to be ready for any changes in education.
- Teachers should encourage their students by being dynamic, and accessible to the students to facilitate the learning process.
- Teachers should make an effort of including the use of technologies and resources in their classes. This could create more interest and motivation in students and as result, it could develop their English learning process at a distance.

To the student:

- Students should learn to manage their time appropriately to accomplish with all their requirements.
- Students should be responsible and take the online courses seriously, just like traditional classes.
- Students should be more independent in all aspects since the teacher is not physically present.

Conclusion

Acquiring a foreign language is a process in which students must have some qualities, resources, as well as, they must possess some cognitive abilities or skills in order to succeed in that process. In the present research, these qualities, resources and cognitive skills were classified and analyzed, and they represent a vital role in the life of a distance learner.

Motivation in distance learning helps the learner to work and learn by themselves, which gives them the opportunity to enjoy and grow to work in an independent way and develop self-confidence to gain satisfaction in their achievements.

Autonomy is a significant factor affecting the students' learning process during distance learning. It is tightly linked to the students' personal traits, urging them to take responsibility for their own learning. However, autonomy is also considerably affected by the learning environment in which the learning process takes place.

Having background knowledge of IT skills is a helpful complement to the students of distance learning. It is important to consider the knowledge of this type of skill mandatory in order to get better results and achieve their goals. Using this skill, the learning is more effective and the learners feel more motivated.

The team concludes that even though perseverance and persistence are very closely related in meaning, it is important to distinguish the difference between both terms. They refer to continue in a course until the end, the difference lies in the result, since with persistence the student is able to complete the course, but not necessarily with success. While perseverance means the student is able to excel and learn from the difficulties.

Then there is a very important skill, which is "determination". This one englobes autonomy, competence and relatedness. All three aspects are crucial when it comes to distance learning since they help the student to succeed in their progress. If they don't have the "determination" skill, they will probably end up dropping out.

The communication skills are very useful because when a student is learning at a distance, the communication with the teacher may be more complicated. A student has to learn to communicate through other means like platforms, conferencing apps, e-mails. The communication has to be effective enough to retain the interest of the student.

There are two important abilities in the mental process that students must possess which are critical thinking and making notes. The first is being a critical thinker so that students are able to synthesize, analyze, and argue their ideas. At the same time, they are conscious of possible changes and challenges during the process of learning. The second is a process in which they make notes so that they can look at any time they want to study in order to be ready for exams or improve their grades; the main technique is mind-mapping and this process was explained in the body of the research.

It is not easy for students to have these qualities and skills, and improve them is a long process, but by being patient and encouraging themselves everything is possible.

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