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Foreign Language Pedagogy in Open and Distance Learning: Digital Platforms & Instructional Design

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Abstract:
The present article attempts to take a critical look at integration of information and communication technologies in teaching/learning of foreign languages to adult learners in the distance mode.
Apart from looking at the logistical aspects, it tries to critically explore factors that enhance engagement in the language learning process thereby increasing alongside, levels of student motivation too.
Integration of ICTs in pedagogical strategies in the foreign language classroom, emerges from the fundamental notion of elaborating and designing systematically, objectives and outcomes within the instructional design. Whereas digital literacy and ease of handling computer-based instruction is largely about the technical competence of the learners and teachers, it is to be understood that as an interface, computer assisted language learning CALL touches upon a larger framework of cognitive bridge created and present solidlybetween the machine and the human.
In such a situation, the role of the teacher/instructor/tutoras well as organizational restructuring assumes great importance,placing a strategic responsibility to formulating and fixing relevant instructional design as per objectives and outcomes intended in the academic course.

Keywords: Information and communication technology,foreign language, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), cognitive support, motivation

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I. INTRODUCTION

The domain of teaching/learning of languages in the distance mode has become near synonymous to use of technology for establishing the link between learner, teacher and pedagogic material. This has pushed ahead need for digital competence of the learner as well as the teacher and on a larger plane, institutional preparedness to incorporating technology in the teaching/learning practices on a regular basis. Distance language learning provides an excellent opportunity for language learners to receive instruction in an adaptable environment. This type of pedagogy offers flexible timemanagement system for students in distance modewho might be under pressure of managing work and studies simultaneously.

Post emergence of new technological advances, research on distancelanguage learning has predominantly been focussed on how new technologies influence distance education. From here has emergedthe importance of how to monitor the change of direction in research on distancelanguage learning.As such, exploring emerging potential areas of research,current methodologies, andproposing solutions to remove existing barriers in this field assume prime importance.

Over a long time, the adult learner, especially in a language class felt constrained in communication and found it difficult to participate in the dialogue with the teacher or even with the peer students. Especially in a situation of autonomous learning/distance learning, this became more pronounced an obstacle due to blockage at two distinct levels. The first was due to stepping into the zone of a new unknown language and secondly, very often using technology that itself brought up new challenges in managing learning.

As it is, in the distance mode, the situation was no longer about receiving lectures unidirectionally, but was more about creating one's own learning pathways and negotiating meanings in a space that was remotely being managed at given intervals by a teacher/tutor or through step by step guidelines present in Self Instructional Materials.

The entire equation in what is called *"Acted'apprentissage*[1]*",* learners as well as teachers become co-creators of knowledge along with innovative pedagogic strategies and a shared platform of negotiation that engaged both teachers as well as learners at cognitive, linguistic as well as ergonomic level.

In fact, it is imperative at this stage to realize that **information and technology as a teaching/learning tool does not operate in isolation but evolves as a function of instructional design and curriculum planning that is developed around the fundamental notion of learning optimization.**

It is important as well to understand here, that course development however much it be dependent on technology, must definitely be "contextualized" and not ever be in isolation of learners' needs, learners' profiles and most importantly, learners' resources. It is only a prudent blending of these aspects that can add pertinence to the teaching/learning resources, whether it is regarding use of a particular technology or even the capability of target learners to be able to handle the technological tools included.

The main idea in this article develops around examining to what extent the intended objectives of the teaching/learning are being catered to by adopting a certain technology – Computer assisted language learning, use of audio-visual tools, online learning, blended courses—success of all these methods is wholly determined through the way

a. Technology is incorporated into the learning design,
b. Strategies are being used to achieve the objectives, and
c. Means of motivation being used to optimize learning engagement of adult language learners.

INCORPORATING ICT IN OPEN &DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the domain of teaching /learning, especially that of a foreign language in distance mode, technology has permeated so strongly that the act of knowledge transfer/exchange seen without the use of a technological tool is unthinkable and introducing the latest models of using technology tools to enhance learning is the more natural option for both teachers as well as learners.

In order to create a certain fluidity in the teaching/learning process, what is of immense importance also, is the emphasis, investment and the interest accorded to incorporation of technology into the infrastructure on the part of authorities and people at the helm of organizational and institutional management.

Also, it is to be understood that through incorporation of ICT in the older models of dissemination and distribution of learning, learners through technology are gradually made more and more autonomous and receptive to new knowledge and skills being imparted.

Handling these new skill sets, makes them feel more empowered and more confident of being part of the professional requirements and job market to which, in the long run knowledge of the foreign language gives them access. Within the space of learning and training, it is the presence of these technologies that creates the **interface**[2] **and transforms the learner to an active participant rather than a passive receptor of the teacher's monologue.**

Teacher training and competence of teachers to be able to use technology to engage learners better, is being seen now as one of the prime prerequisites for efficient teaching/learning especially for foreign languages.In recent years, including ICTs into the teaching/learning of foreign languages comes forth as a veritable challenge. Communicative competence involving reading, writing and speaking emerge clearly as prime areas of training and developing communicative competence while designing a skill based foreign language course, especially of adult learners and that too in the distance mode.

In the diagrammatic representation below, we try to show the correlation between TICEs used as agents of teaching/learning and the dynamics underlining course planning , teacher training and learning outcomes.

[1]MONTANDON,Christiane; Sensibilisation d'étudiants en formation des adultes au maniement de la zone proximale de développement "; Nouveaux cahiers de la recherche en education; Volume 19, Numéro 1, 2016, p. 57–87

[2]WHITE,Cynthia; "Towards a Learner-based Theory of Distance Language Learning: The Concept of the Learner–Context Interface" in Distance Education and Languages; Multilingual Matters;Bristol, 2005.

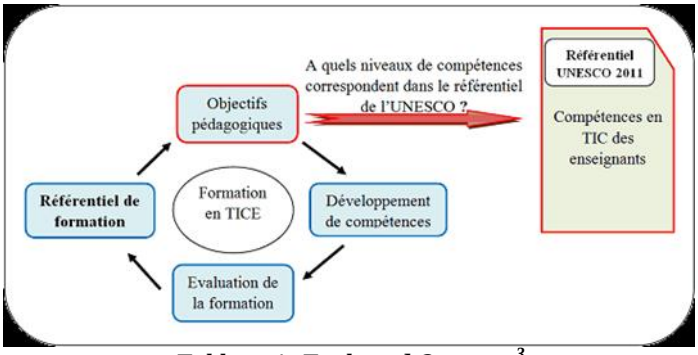

Tableau 1: Tools and Outcome[3]

Along with the above three competencies mentioned above, there is yet another dimension of linguistic skill that becomes extremely important in a foreign language class. That involves the capability to interact.

The Common European Framework for Reference to Languages (CEFR)[4] in its notings had added this fifth area of developing competence, clearly mentioning the importance of this for one to one communication among the speakers of the new language learnt. This mode of exchange, is seen as inherently different from the pattern of language competence needed for simple reading or writing activities. The immediacy of responding in ***"la langue cible"***needed to be developed in the learners.

Since one is discussing distance learning of the foreign languages here, it would be interesting to note that in absence of a face to face interaction between teacher-learner- peer learners**, the need of synchronous mode of exchange becomes extremely important.** Using technology to enhance intercommunication can only be resolved by incorporating modules that have elements of synchronous communication (real time exchange orally or through chat sessions).

This specific genre of competence to interact, creates a sharp bridge between--

- **The learner's own resources,**
- **The way he/she has decided to use them, and**
- **An impromptu competence of making the message understood by the recipient.**

This last skill allows the learner to stretch to maximum use the newly acquired language and blend these with the "already existing set of skills **(*le réseau des connaissancespréalables*).**

Clearly, this model of learning system is heavily dependent on technological advancements on the one hand and efficient instructional design on the other[5].

So as to maximize the learner involvement and motivation levels, a modified set of technologies and pedagogical tools have become popular which in turn is creating an alternate space of hybrid/blended learning for facilitating this kind of skill based instruction.

The original philosophy behind distance education was to provide high quality education for people who do not have access to the traditional classes because of theirfamily or vocational issues. But post emergence of new technologies, distance education has shown itself as a crucial part of education in general and language learning in particular.

Technology inclusion in Distance Learning courses essentially follows two main lines of incorporating technology:

[3]http://www.epi.asso.fr/revue/articles/a1409c.htm

[4]The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an international standard for describing language ability. It describes language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing, such as teachers or learners, to see the level of different qualifications. It also means that employers and educational institutions can easily compare our qualifications to other exams in their country.

[5]McKinney, Dyck, & Luber; "iTunes University and the classroom: Can podcasts replace Professors?"Computers & Education 52 (2009) 617–623; Elsevier.

- **Synchronous, and**
- **Asynchronous.**

In**synchronous language learning**, all learners are simultaneously, though not physically in the same location, connected on different computers on a network.

There are few more existing patterns of usage of such connected learning. For example, thisapproach can be put into practice by video conferencing as well as live instructional programsonline and on air.

This is often termed as the**"paced model of distance learning"[6],**where synchronicity (communication in real time) becomes the underlining process of instructional technology.

Emerging from the principle of "connectivism",it simulates a real classroom situation where all learners and teachers are connected via technology and each learner can dynamically engage in thelearning/teaching process.

In Distance learning contexts, this creates in itself a kind of robust **"student support system"** that is a self-paced and self-generating agent performing multiple functions such as :-

- **Motivating the independent learner**
- **Creating peer cooperation and group work skills**
- **Enhancing real time interaction that improves oral language competence, and**
- **Instilling confidence regarding digital management of courses.**

Asynchronous instruction on the other hand, guarantees deriving benefit of the pedagogical support at any time regardless of time restrictions.

The most commonly used technologies in this category would be **E mails, podcasting (where students can download the recorded materials and use them at their convenienttime)**, **blogs and multimedia video clips.** Language learners specifically benefit a lot from such technology since there is a lot of repetition needed and in asynchronous mode, the adult learner is capable of rewinding and replaying the same clip several times[7].

This type of asynchronous learning technology hasits own benefits offering flexibility in pacing as well as the possibility of multiple practice sessions to hone language skills.

Having discussed the two major streams of technology inclusion in distance language learning, it is interesting to mention briefly a third type of teaching/learning practice that is fast becoming the most preferred mode of pedagogical practices followed globally.

It is the **"BlendedLearning"** or the **"Hybrid model"[8]**of teaching/learning which offers a mixture of synchronous andasynchronous learning technologies. This, ensures advantages of both traditional campus-based classes along withtraining offered in the distancemode.Nunan[9] mentioned that a blended strategy of print, online, and offlineresources could offer greater flexibility for distance and online education where integration of web-based technologies could easily boost at the same time capabilities of distancelearning practices too.

BALANCING OBJECTIVES, MOTIVATION & STRATEGIES

In setting the optimization track of the teaching/learning process through technologically connected spaces, it is imperative to structure and establish a coherent balance between objectives of the course, learner resources and needs and the technological interface that acts as the concrete linking source between the major participants of the "*Actesd'apprentissage".*

[6]https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/Fall133/anderson_poellhuber_mcKerlich133.html

[7]CHESTER, Andrea et al; "Podcasting in Education: Student Attitudes, Behaviour and Self-Efficacy"; April 2011; Educational Technology & Society; 14(2):236-247

[8] Ibid

[9]Emerita Bañados; "A Blended-learning Pedagogical Model for Teaching and Learning EFL Successfully Through an Online Interactive Multimedia Environment"; Vol. 23, No. 3; Calico Journal;2006.

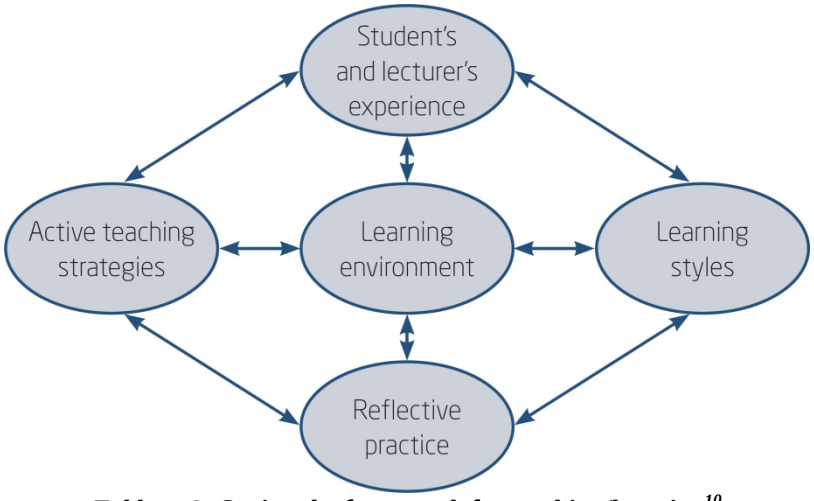

Tableau 2: Setting the framework for teaching/learning[10]

The diagram above shows clearly the potential held by a systematically drawn out instructional design to achieve objectives that underlie the course through application of specific pedagogical tools. This would include for example gaining communicative competence in real life situations, preferred reading skills, listening to lectures on specific topics etc. For these objectives, the desired tools for attaining skill levels would be developing learning around all channels of technologies of information and communication that encourage two basic things:-

a. Mastering those technical skills that enable efficient flow of knowledge plus interaction at both ends (learner as well as teacher), and

b. Enhancing communicative competencies through maximizing use of synchronous and asynchronous methods of using the new language learnt.

As we claim that objectives of the course are fulfilled by systematic curriculum design and use of technology as tools, it often is seen that the technical knowhow plus the techno savviness of the instructors/teachers itself is capable of setting innovative targets and new goals accompanied by equally matching and innovative technology use. Familiarity with the latest software and modalities of **connective pedagogy**, aspects of oral language learning, grammar, pronunciation etc. can be strongly encouraged within a distance language learning model with sufficient means of learner motivation and involvement.

This is all equally complemented by enhanced possibilities of flexibility of duration as well as place of learning and time slots, multiple exit points (modular structuration in courses), credit transfers etc., all these variations and learner centered practices naturally play strong roles as learner motivators.

« la motivation encontextescolaireest un étatdynamique qui a sesorigines dans les perceptions qu'unélève a de lui-même et de son environnement et qu'ill'incite à choisiruneactivité, à s'y engager et à persévérer dans son accomplissementafind'atteindre un but"[11].

From this perspective, It is understandable that the learner is at times allowed to learn through his/her own errors too.This allows for negotiation of meanings and construction of knowledge that makes the entire pedagogical process more participative for the student. It is in fact another way of understanding what Michael Moore had referred to in his theory of *"Transactional Distance"*way back in distance learning that theorized modes of minimizing "cognitive distance" between learner and teacher.

Active participation in learning the new language, transforms the learner into a co-creator of his learnings and inclusion of information and communication technologies help bring in motivation, confidence as well as competence to develop on his/her own, customized learning strategies that are more tailored to his own "learning styles".

[10] https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/learningobjectives.html

[11] https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/La-motivation-en-contexte-scolaire-%3A-les-r%C3%A9sultats-Vie/2f41b82c335c073b9a19023cf806907adc0790d7?p2df

In the following section, we try to discuss some concrete instances of ICT usage in distance language learning situations.

II. DIGITAL TOOLS AND IMPACTS

The use of technology in the foreign language class is not new, as we have seen in the usage of **audio visual** gadget since long during the period SGAVs in the 50s and 60s. But the advent of **high speed internet** and two way communication enhanced possibility of customizing courses through connectivity as well as inbuilt flexibility in the programme structure that made language learning at a distance through technology, more and more popular especially among adult learners.

Wang (2004) in one of his studies on role of **videoconferencing**examined its impact as a synchronous tool to supportdistance education. Lack of intercommunication in real time caused maximum gap in oral language competence.At the same time, it was seen that provision of videoconferencing in distance language learning could lead to enhancing the amount of oral and visual interactions. There was however, divided opinion on the nature of oral and visual support offered in **Computer mediated courses (CMCs).**

At the level of cognitive scaffolding, it was seen that **CMC** encouraged expression as well as negotiation of meanings by creation of learner support systems and peer communities that exchanged freely among each other to share and create their own networks of knowledge and skills[12].

Besides the cognitive sphere, Computer mediated communication was again found to contribute significantlytowards providing emotional support to the distance learner and could contribute significantly inovercoming isolation in distance learning thereby helping construct an educationalcommunity between learners[13].

Another device that has been actively used as a product of information and technology and used frequently in programs of distancelanguage learning is A**synchronous Videoconferencing system**.By using a software named **"NetMeeting"[14],**different aspects of task design such as its "practicality, language-learning potential,learner friendliness,authenticity, and its positive influence" have been found impactful.

Especially for its language-learning potential, the amount of learner engagement and the extent of theirimprovement have shown high levels of performance and these were also customized as per the learners' personal learning styles. NetMeeting videoconferencing acted as tools of supporting students, and linguistic proficiency levels in the target language showed steep improvements.

In a study by Pearson et al[15]. (2008)comparable outcomes for speakingproficiency of three modes of classroom-based, distance and hybrid educations were made. Comparisons were studied on articulation, accuracy, and fluency from before the start of the experiment and corresponding scores at the end of experiment,It was found that oral proficiency scores were significantly improved.Another study[16], explored effectiveness of **audio-videoconferencing** in online distance language learning programs of the Open University, Milton Keynes.

These analysed some of the most important and challenging issues in online learning Programssuch as:

- **Instructional design of the learning program,**
- **Training programs for teachers,and**
- **Available extent of student support.**

A study around application of thesoftware named **"Lyceum"** was sent to the students and afterwards, the collected data analyzed. The results clearly showedthat the use of the specific software contributedsignificantly to the effectiveness of audio-video conferencing in distance language learning.

[12] Dorothy M. Chunb, Richard E. Mayerb,Detlev Leutnerc ; "Cognitive load in reading a foreign language text with multimedia aids and the influence of verbaland spatial abilities";Computers in Human Behavior 19 (2003) 221–243; Elsevier.

[13]Ibid

[14]WANG,Yuping; "Supporting Synchronous Distance Language Learning with Desktop Videoconferencing"' Language, Learning and Technology 8(3); September 2004.

[15]BLAKE,R, WILSON ,N et al; Measuring Oral Proficiency in Distance, Face-to Face, and Blended Classrooms; Learning & Technology; October 2008, Volume 12, Number 3; pp. 114-127

[16]HAMPEL, R & HAUCK,M; "TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE USE OF AUDIO CONFERENCING IN DISTANCE LANGUAGE COURSES"; Language Learning & Technology; January 2004, Volume 8, Number 1; pp. 66-82

Through **Synchronous audioconferencing tools**,distance language learning transforms itself into a highly dynamic and interactive space underlined by high flexibility in learning strategies with simultaneous margins for semantic negotiation.

Besides, integration of different modalities such as voice, video, text and links intovideoconferencing system of distance language learning make it more functional and motivational. However, it was found also thatmore attention was needed on developing teacher training modules that could take care of the constant requirement of up-dation in digital knowledge and competence.

White (2007) argued that teacher's role in distancelanguage learning should be particularly highlighted to underscore how differentidentities can affect the course results.

Podcasting in distance language learning

One of the devices that has the capability of facilitating the course of instruction indistance language learning is podcasting. Many researchers[17] have investigated the effect ofpodcasting[18] on language learning.

This digital tool allows excellent support for alleducational and academic targets[19] , and can be implemented easily as atool to upload and share recorded video materials, audio files, links, and softwares for learners benefiting from different modes of distance language learning. Besides this,a podcasting device can easily make up for the physical absence in any class either face to face orvirtual because it provides an opportunity to listen and/or watch the recorded sessions at a later time that be convenient to the learner.

Another frequently used technology is**Vodcasting[20] or videopodcasting that was**mentioned as a tool to improve vocabulary learning exercise. The vodcasting systemproved to be successful in enhancing vocabulary knowledge. Same way, **audioblogs,** theway in which audio files are uploaded and shared between different learners, were found that apart from lending technical support, these tools could easily transform into major sources of learner motivation and peer cooperation.

Mobile Assisted language learning (MALL)provides strategic and extensive support plus maintenance for learners in distancelanguage learning. In numerous studies[2122], different aspects of language learning have been investigated bymeasuring different ways of utilizing **mobile assisted language learning (MALL)** inrelation to distance language learning.For example, the use of **Short messaging system or SMS** has been particularlyemphasized in many studies. The greater positive effect of introducing students withutilizing short messaging system in vocabulary enhancement and retention is visible in many works;[23].

Similar to **Short Messaging System,Multimedia Messaging System or MMS** has also been implemented in some projects[24]as a tool to motivate adult learners as well as to fosterconnectivity and interaction among students.

In recent years **Whatsapp groups, Google Hangouts Twitter and Facebook** have strongly contributed to connective learning and creation of semi-monitored learning situations. Often when teachers also are members of these unique groups established on social media portals, it creates a platform for vital exchange, sharing and supported learning to take place.

These tools are then used both as channels of synchronous as well as asynchronous models of communication for distance language learning and have shown up in studies to building up enriched learning communities online and contributed toMALL technology in organizing a contextualized network among students. It was foundthat students can reflect on each other's' published posts online by going through comments.

Online Chatting has received equal attention among languageresearchers as a unique form of enhancing linguistic competence.

Almost seen at crossroads of**"oral language competence" and "written language competence"**, chatting promotes a unique process whereby the learners are putting into written the spoken language.

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[17] https://www.scirp.org/(S(i43dyn45teexjx455qlt3d2q))/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=1690476

[18] Sajad Faramarzi et al;" New Insights into Distance Language Learning ; Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research;Volume 2, Issue 8, 2015, pp. 191-207

[19] Ibid

[20] https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=787029

[21] ANDERSON,Tom,Hwang,Wu-Yuin et al; " A study of a mobile collaborative learning system for Chinese language learning" ;https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240642862

[22] https://www.e-teaching.org/materialien/literatur/bollen-et-al-2004

[23] AZABDAFTARI &MOZAHEB.M.L; "Comparing vocabulary learning of EFL learners by using two different strategies:Mobile learning vs. flashcards"; .; Vol 20, No 2 (2012); https://doi.org/10.4995/eurocall.2012.11377

[24] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301647125_Dynamic_lighting_system_for_the_learning_environment_Performance_of_elementary_students

This mode of expression often took them closer to the native levels and style of communication especially if the learners were in conversation(chatting) with a native speaker[25]. In their studyalso found that the amount of self -correction, especiallyif learnerswere chatting with native speakers in online text-based chat seemed more than that during face-to-face context and this way they were able to better self -evaluate.

In the process of sending and receiving messages via **Twitter** for example, it was seen that there was significant enhancement incommunicative and cultural competence of language learners and helped in promotingtheir communicative and cultural output in the target language without being present in person.

Another interesting area for research is the **Gamification** or **Game-based cooperative language learning**environment. In a study by Lin,Youngand Hung[26], it is confirmed that acooperative **"web-enabled PDA-based scrabble game (WiCFG)"** can motivate students to improve lexique inthe foreign language vocabulary by providing also an opportunity for learners tomediate, share anddiscuss the new words they have learnt.

The concept of Gamification is comparatively recent, and according to Werbach and Hunter[27], is the use of game design techniques in non-game contexts. The main objectives focus on increasing the participation of the learner, which most of the time is called or mentioned as the "user", and motivate him/her by incorporating game elements and techniques, like leader-boards and immediate feedback.

This creates in the users a sense of achievement and engagement in a way that the learner finds himself into a process and sets to achieve set targets. These might involve simple language based quizzes or filling in the right word or even simple games involving play with new words learnt in the target language. In addition, understanding the basic concepts of the games becomes essential at the time of delineating and using Gamification as strategy and a motivating agent.

The Net Support Software

The Net Support software has been widely used for distance language learning in connected environments in institutions. This has advantages of monitoring, as well as synchronous interaction among all participating learners and the teacher.

Apart from benefits of allowing the teacher to share and send worksheets and content to the students. It allows usage of multimedia apart from audio and video clips, all being controlled and managed centrally by the teacher but being disseminated to students at once. In other words, sharing, recording and distribution of worksheets can be all carried out simultaneously by the teacher located at a distance with the students spread across all over geographically.

This specific software was seen to bring in the following benefits in the situation of teaching/learning of languages at a distance to the adult learner:-

a. Learners reacted positively and showed higher motivation levels,
b. Learners showed in due course lower drop-out rates
c. Interactivity with teacher and peers could increase
d. Levels of autonomy among learners showed a rise
e. Unique and customized evaluation patterns allowed learners to feel more involved and attended to
f. Simultaneous assessment and synchronicity allowed a healthy presence of formative assessment as well as auto evaluation.
g. The connected environment helped interaction in the new language as also fostered peer cooperation.

III. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Successful inclusion of ICT in courses of distance language learning depends greatly in providing Computer Mediated Communication that is user friendly i.e. the kind of network that be not too complicated for users to work with. This particular issue was discussed in a study by Hampel and Hauck (2004) that the environment should be ***"non- threatening, confidence building, and fun"***.

[25]Chun Lai &Mingyue Gu;"Self-regulated out-of-class language learning with technology; Computer Assisted Language Learning" ; Vol.24, Issue 4; Pages 317-335 ;Published online: 24 Jun 2011

[26] LIN,Chiu Pin & HUNG, Hui-Chun;"The Game-Based Constructive Learning Environment to Increase English Vocabulary Acquisition: Implementing a Wireless Crossword Fan-Tan Game (WiCFG) as an Example"; . Fifth IEEE International Conference onConference: Wireless, Mobile, and Ubiquitous Technology in Education, WMUTE 2008.

[27]WERBACH, K & HUNTER, D; "The Gamification Toolkit: Dynamics, Mechanics, and Components for the Win"; Wharton School Press; 2015.

At the same time, it is to be remembered that technical problems can profoundly affect the quality and outcomes of the teaching process. Bad sound quality, connectivity problems and faulty equipment are some of the problems which need attention before starting any kind of assignment. The quality of audio and video files also affect considerably students' attitude towards the whole program and consequently play a crucial role in learner motivation.

Choosing the more efficient software or technical tool needs to be assessed as per the intended outcomes of different computer mediated communication systems to distinguish the most practical ones from the large number of options available.

For example, in the case of podcasting which is an interactive way to share recorded audio/video files with students and receive feedback from students regarding the quality of instruction, teachers can provide learner supportto students in a variety of different ways –Engaging them by providing examples, photos and video materials, providing high quality audio and video materials, informing about copyrights, providing technical support to those who might have problems using online resources[28] (Cited in Faramarzi and Bagheri, 2015) and maximizing the amount of interaction between teachers and students.

Another obstacle that comes up often is the cost of the programs which has to be made affordable for all students.

This type of language learning offers great opportunity for people living in developing countries who cannot afford to attend regular classes. However, in many situations even the price of internet connection and proper materials can be in itself a major constraint for many people, hampering participation in distance education programs. Institutional and financial support thus needs to be provided to encourage students and ensuring seamless connectivity and access to teaching and training to learners enrolled.

Drawing out structuration of a typical distance language learning course has been proposed by Curtis, Duchastel, and Radic (1999) as having 6 major components:

- **Distance nature**
- **Flexible studying hours**
- **Multimedia involvement**
- **Interacting with others**
- **Personalized learning experience**
- **Integrative nature, and**
- **Cost Benefit,**

IV. NEW DIRECTIONS &AREAS OF CONCERN

Distance language learning has undoubtedly changed the educational system to be a cost-effective approach in which it cuts down many of students' expenses such as transportation costs and buying textbooks.

The quality of instruction is another significant issue. Students can easily work on their weak points by reviewing the recorded materials of every session. This kind of troubleshooting technique is not available in traditional classes because in many regular classes students are not allowed to record the class lectures[29]

One of the problems related to the use of digital pedagogical tools itself is how this kind of learning be implemented through the medium of technology and how it should be tackled with greaterconsideration. In order to mitigate barriers, facilitate the process of language learning and obtain optimum results, differential instructional should be incorporated and psychological and logistic barriers be removed as priority.

There are some criticisms mentioned often regarding distance language learning for adult learners in language classes. Most of these negative remarks emerge from the issue that distance education lacks regular face-to-face interaction as present in the traditional classes. By the introduction of technological expansions in contemporary emergent technologies of distance educations e.g. blogs, wikis, and online classes, it is not necessary to be cautious about the students' presence inside the traditional classes as most of the students use online technologies for just about every activity in their real lives.

Students aiming to be engaged in distance language learning need to be provided with clear and necessary instruction on how to make the best use of online courses. Moreover, teachers are recommended to motivate students by increasing students'awareness about the advantages of online language learning. It is also important to note that supplementary materials should be provided through the use of e-learning programs and websites that enable teachers to demonstrate different features like graphs, videos, and slides.

[28]FARAMARZI,S & BAGHERI,A.;"Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objects"' 4, 167–190. http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/worldlearning_publications/1/ Faramarzi, S., & Bagheri, A. (2015)

[29]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228635455_Podcasting_and_its_use_in_enhancing_course_content

Besides, distance language learning systems need to be flexible enough to be compatible with different profiles of students. Therefore, such a program will motivate students by providing an authentic and interactive environment. The fact that distance education allows students to study without having direct contact with the teachers should not diminish the nature and the amount of interaction between teachers and students and that communication technology does not eliminate the amount of classroom work. It only acts as a catalyst to provide a better opportunity for students to improve their learning experience.

Wang highlighted the significance of videoconferencing tools as a device to utiize synchronous learning; it is undisputably important to consider an outstanding nature of interaction in distance language learning. Likewise, learners need to be supported all the time to maintain a desirable progress rate. In order to minimize the gap stemmed from lesser face to face interaction between teachers and students in distance language learning, different strategies such as connecting on social media, and videoconferencing should be implemented to establish a connection among learners, teachers, and content materials*(Transactional Distance inActepédagogique).*

It is but natural that this procedure is dependent greatly on some fundamental factors as outlined below

1**. User friendliness,**
2. Audio and video quality,
3. Other features of pedagogical value,
4. Reliability, and
5. Cost.

V. CONCLUSION

The present article has investigated the major areas of research in distance language learning by analyzing previous works and recommending potential areas of research for future studies. Since this is a huge domain of study, understanding the barriers and the available gaps are really important to optimize results. Since this is totally a distinct type of education, there seems to be many issues and problems which need to be investigated in a systematic and scientific way in order to be able to devise equally effective solutions.

Future studies can be particularly focused on a variety of different issues, e.g.implementing more user-friendly applications, providing better technical support, and facilitating the amount of peer interaction. For many students, distance language learning program, like any other new experience, can be stressful. Accordingly, more research is needed to focus on students' anxiety and the ways to build their confidence.

It is also a medium if instruction which needs a consciousness raising on behalf of teachers, learners and institutional infrastructure.All stakeholders involved in this kind of E-learning should be clear about the objectives, and requisite strategies and tools to achieve them. It becomes thusequally necessary to train teachers and students about requirements and outcomes of the entire process of teaching/learning involved.

At the same time, more focus and attention is necessary to be put on the integration of different devices and materials such as the electronic ones. Training teachers to understand and choose accurate applications through distance programs is also of paramount importance. These couldalso require developing different computerized tests and innovative evaluation models which necessitate augmenting interaction between students and teachers, developing differential teaching/learning tools, taking cognizance of prior learning of students or even setting customized parameters for promoting formative assessment techniques throughout the period of the course.

Language learning in distance mode takes into account issue of self-evaluation through computerized testing and this has been seen to significantly help adult students to monitor and periodically assess ongoing learning progress.

There are still plenty of challenges in distance language learning and only byunderstanding the importance of learner needs, technology usage and management of instructional design will the new age learners be confronted with initiatives where they will be in charge of their own learning. Finally, how learnerswork with intrinsic motivation is another challenge, since extrinsic motivation at times could interfere with the main learning objectives. Instead of enhancing motivation, mismanagement of technology use could create a stage of alienation or boredom that could impact severely the learning curve of the target language.

The underlining need is balancing objectives and outcomes; and it is only by keeping the learner at the centre of the dynamics and customizing technology use as per the set outcomes will institutions be finally able to create a successful and sustainable model for distance language learning aimed at the digital native learners in the times to come.

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