

Review of Sources to Learn German with the Help of Distance Education Tools

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Abstract

Recently Germany is becoming a magnet for international students from all over the world. The article explores some of the best online courses that use distance education tools. It is an established fact that Germany is a higher education paradise. Unlike in any other country, in Germany you will find many worldwide ranked universities, countless courses to choose among, globally valued degrees that promise a high employability to you and affordable living costs. Moreover, Germany has a long and rich history, a vibrant and dynamic lifestyle mixing the modern and the classics, the urban and the rural which will immerse and make you love every second spent here. Not surprisingly, Germany is ranked among the world's top destinations for international students. According to the latest official statistics, there are over 357,000 foreign students seeking a university degree in Germany whereas the number is steadily increasing. Every year, thousands of scholars coming from all around the world trust their education to German universities and reasons for this are obvious. The article provides valuable information about e-courses based on DE technologies.

Keywords: Online Course; Distance Education; German; website

1.0. Introduction

Since the 19th century, when the concept of distance education first appeared, there have been great changes in distance education activities parallel to the developments in technology. It is seen that this change has occurred especially in the tools used in distance education, the technological sub-structure, learners' demographical backgrounds and in their expectations. Online German language courses make learning German an easier mission to accomplish, without having to spend a lot of money. With everything getting digital these days, you have an amazing opportunity to learn a new language on your own and at your own pace. All these websites and online applications are designed to suit different kinds of learners. For example, if you're better at memorizing new words using pictures to associate them, you can use an application that asks you to link words to particular objects. Or you can use applications that allow interactive conversations, to practice German in real time, if that's how you learn better.

There are countless websites that promise to help you learn German, which makes it hard for you to choose the best one and get faster results. In addition to this, there are also unreliable and scam websites that should be avoided. But, don't worry! You're in the right hands. In this article, we've covered the advantages and disadvantages of the best online resources. Therefore, we're confident that in the end, you'll be ready to select a German language course that suits you best.

2.0. Methodology

Research into the distance learning of languages is now established as a significant avenue of enquiry in language teaching, with evident research trajectories in several domains. This article selects and analyses significant areas of investigation in distance language learning and teaching to identify new and emerging gaps, along with research questions, methodologies and research tools. Taken together these define a research agenda focusing on theory, pedagogy, technology use, learner contributions, innovation and less commonly taught languages. Within those broad areas, the scope of proposed research tasks includes the distinctive features and practices of distance language teaching, task design for synchronous settings, mentoring, multimodal learning environments, the transfer of speaking skills, and learners' affective experiences. To conclude, a number of guidelines are given for future enquiry addressing the distinctive nature of research into distance language teaching and learning and the need for a rich evidence base in both theory and practice.

3.0. Discussion

3.1. Yabla

Yabla is a great platform for learning German online. Their main feature is videos. Its website contains an endless amount of videos in pretty much every possible topic, and for every level of German learning. Whether you're a complete beginner or an advanced German learner, Yabla has language learning videos for everyone.

These videos tend to improve students' listening skills, comprehension, spelling, and expanding the vocabulary. It engages and encourages you to identify unknown words and listening to them carefully.

The best part of these videos is that they have transcripts associated with them so every time you watch a video you can also have a transcript of that particular lesson.

Also, you can slow down videos and listen carefully to any word that may sound unfamiliar to you or that you didn't hear how it was pronounced. If there's a word which you don't understand you can click it in the subtitles and an explanation of it will appear below, which is a really nice feature.

Additionally, Yabla gives you the opportunity to print out these transcripts in English and in German so you can make a closer comparison to identify unknown words.

Advantages

Authentic German – All videos available in Yabla are from native speakers and therefore their authenticity is 100%. As such, if one day you get the chance to visit Germany you won't need a single adjustment to your German language as taught on Yabla.

Dictionaries – One of the biggest advantage you can seek when learning German online is having an exact explanation of each new word you're about to learn. Lucky for you, this online German language course platform has integrated dictionaries which offer you the opportunity to get the meaning of an unknown word at any time.

Slow Play – Struggling to hear exactly how some words are spelt is an issue for everyone learning German online, whether he/she has started from scratch or is already an advanced speaker. For this purpose, Yabla has introduced the Slow Play feature. Every time there's a word you find it difficult to understand you just rewind it and play it slowly until you're able to pronounce it.

Phrase Repeat – If you miss a word while listening to a video on Yabla, don't worry, you can still rewind it and listen to it again.

Fill in the Blank – A good way to put your improvement to a test is by having incomplete sentences where there's a blank space to enter a word. While listening to a lesson on Yabla you can tap onto the Fill in the Blank option and there you can find these sentences where you are required to come up with a correct word.

Listening games – It is proven that people can learn faster and effectively when they have fun while learning. This online language course offers you a lot of so-called listening games where you gain the adrenaline of completing levels and improve your German listening abilities at the same time.

Dual-language captions – Probably the feature that is most closely referred to Yabla is dual language captions. When listening to a video on this online German language course, below you can switch subtitles between English and German. Also, you can have a printed version of the transcript before even watching the video.

Flashcards– None of us can memorize a word instantaneously and remember it right at the moment we need it. Flashcards are a perfect way of having these unfamiliar words always close to us. After several occasions, facing those words and checking on our Flashcard list will permanently engrave them on your neurons. On Yabla, while listening to a video you can click on a familiar word on subtitles and save it on your Flashcard list.

Disadvantages

No podcasts – For those who may prefer learning German online by only using their listening senses, the online language course Yabla, unfortunately, doesn't offer podcasts.

No interactive conversations – if you like to practice speaking of a topic you just heard a video about you need to find a partner with whom you can learn together since Yabla doesn't offer interactive discussion where you're asked a question and then your response is evaluated.

Limited videos for free – The Yabla free version offers only a limited number of videos. To get the best out of it you need to pay a modest price to have an access to an unlimited number of videos. For those who are really serious in their intention to learn German, this wouldn't be considered a disadvantage at all, when you know the value of having access to all these videos.

3.2. GermanPod101

The final one in our list is GermanPod101. This online German language course will make learning German fun and easy for you.

Their library contains a huge amount of podcasts. Not surprisingly, some say this platform is made for busy people. Using GermanPod101 you'll learn German at two most utmost edges, from the most basic expressions to the depth of grammar.

Advantages

Podcasts – The most typical feature of this online language learning platform are podcasts. There are many of them offered on GermanPod101. Download them on your device and listen to them whenever you have time.

Learn German culture – All materials at the GermanPod101 have to do with the German culture. So besides learning their language, using this online German language course will help learn you a lot about their culture. If one day you get the chance to visit Germany you won't make any mistake everyone makes when it faces a new culture.

Dashboard – It is a feature that helps you control the progress of learning and track lessons. There are two sections "My courses" and "The recommendation list". If you let the platform know what is your level of German language, it will come up with a recommendation list with what to begin.

Disadvantages

No speaking required – As already mentioned, the GermanPod101 focus is on podcasts, and therefore speaking is not required. Surely, you can repeat of what you heard on those podcasts, but that's different to being required.

No community of users – Different to other online German language courses mentioned here, the GermanPod101 doesn't have a members' forum.

3.3. Preply

Preply is another outstanding online German language course. Its huge community gathers tutors from over 177 countries of the world who teach every possible subject.

You can find your German language tutor in no time, following three easy steps. Customize your searching engine like, for example, selecting the range of budget you can afford, and visit every tutor's profile before deciding which to choose, send him/her a request and wait for their response. No matter how your fluency of the German language currently is, you will most certainly find a suitable tutor to learn from.

Advantages

Learn from experienced professionals – Every Preply tutor has the required qualifications to maintain a particular online course. The online language German course is conducted by professionals and German native speakers so you will learn from the best.

Study plan specifically for you – Having a tutor entirely for your self, has many benefits. One of them is clearly working out a suitable study plan for you. You can arrange every step of your course mixing the tutor's suggestions and your preferences.

Learning sessions at any time – Clearly, there's not another online language German course, who would fit the best in your daily agenda. You can decide to have a learning session right before the bed and your tutor won't even mind it. Good for those who like to complain they don't have time.

Speak without fear – Most of us feel a bit stressful when speaking a foreign language for the first time. However, on Preply you have no other option than facing your fear and speak the words out. Don't worry, though it may seem tricky at the beginning, you'll get relieved after one or two sessions.

Discounts – Basically, the number of sessions offered by a tutor depends mainly on how much you're ready to pay. Fortunately, the Preply has a flexible pricing scheme, aiming to make it easier for you to afford it. In other words, the higher you pay the larger will be premium discounts.

Disadvantages

It's not free – Unfortunately, Preply is not offered for free. Tutors on this online German language course set their own prices individually. For each of them, you can check their profile and see what are their pricing for learning sessions.

No podcasts – Though you can attend lessons on Preply at any time, there are no podcasts offered to you so you can listen to them while you're driving or having a short break at your job. However, it still depends on your tutor. He or she may send audio files to you if that's what you want.

3.4. Rocket Languages

Rocket Languages is a brilliant (probably the most brilliant and comprehensive one) online resource to learn the German language. Their RocketGerman, an online German language course is one of the most popular for learning this language online. The whole thing comes at three levels, based on the level of your German knowledge: Premium, Premium Plus, and Platinum.

Advantages

No ongoing monthly charges – The very best feature of this online German language course is that there are no monthly charges. Once you get it you won't need to pay for upcoming updates. Furthermore, it updates automatically, so you will lose nothing.

Podcasts – The first section you'll get through when using the Rocket Languages is the Interactive Audio Course. This is a set of podcasts which are around 20 minutes long. You can download them on your computer or any other media device and use them whenever you want. These audio files will learn you basic german expressions like ordering a coffee.

Refund – Woahh! A fantastic feature. Try RocketLanguages for up to 60 days and if you don't like content and you think it doesn't match your learning style, just contact them for a refund. This is a risk-free way to see if this language course is for you.

Mobile app – The online German language course offers a mobile application (German Rocket). You can download for a minimal price and use it on your cell phone whenever you want.

Progress Tracking – Another good feature of this resource is the opportunity to track your progress. This will tell you how much you have improved and which parts of your language skills need more refinement. Knowing how you're progressing is very important because it will keep your motivation up, something that is very important when learning a foreign language.

Flashcards –Flashcards are an effective way of collecting unknown words and by referring to them more than once it helps saving them in our permanent memory.

Members' Forum – There's nothing better than learning alongside with other individuals who are doing the same. The RocketLanguages has their Member's Forum that gathers everyone that is using this online German language course where they share experiences and help each other.

Disadvantages

Not available in stores – Unfortunately, the RocketLanguages app is not available on mobile stores. Currently, you can only purchase the app on their website.

Minor unnecessary corrections – The RocketLanguages enables you to speak out the word and then hear it, so you can see how you pronounced it. Although, not too often, the RocketLanguages may correct your phrases which are normally not wrong. For example, you can say “Wie geht’s” instead of “Wie geht es dir”? which is technically right.

Skipping lessons freely– On the RocketLanguages online German language course, you’re free to skip lessons without watching them for a second. If you lack self-discipline, it may be harder for you to learn German with this platform.

3.5. Lingoda

Lingoda is a brilliant online language school which offer courses in four different languages, including German, French, Italian and Spanish. Students get to learn from passionate, communicative and hard-working native speakers who have a strong educational background.

The main distinctive feature of this online resource for learning German is the high flexibility of Lingoda’s courses. Its internationally-known curriculum is designed to match everyone and allows you to tailor the study module to your personal needs or preferences. You can either attend the course alone or you can join an online group of 5 students.

Plus, at the beginning of your course, there will be an assessment stage that will precisely tell at what level is your German at the moment and according to it will suggest a certain schedule of your classes. Also, there will be an advisor who will be responsible for teaching you and tracking your progress at any time throughout your course.

If you are a person who has a heavy daily agenda, Lingoda is a perfect choice. You can decide for the most part of the schedule of your classes so you can decide to attend them whenever you want, just make sure you have a proper device and have an Internet connection.

Advantages

Cost-efficient courses – Usually, online language schools tend to be expensive. However, Lingoda comes at a reasonable price; €8.50 per each 60-minute lecture which is very affordable.

Individual and group courses – Depending on your personal preferences you can decide to have an individual language course or engage with a class comprised of other students. Note that at maximum a group can contain 5 students in order for teaching efficiency to be achieved. During classes, you can all virtually connect through online means like Skype or Adobe Connect to create the same teaching atmosphere as being in a commonplace.

Flexible courses – Lingoda aims to be an exemption to the traditional schooling system where you have to travel back and forth to a certain place to attend classes or meet certain time limits. You can arrange the schedule of your course as you want in order to suit your daily activities. If you’re busy working or waiting for your commute transportation or your flight is delayed you can use breaks in between to learn something new.

Personal Advisor – It is very important you have a professional who’s always there to track your progress and guide your improvement with specific advice. This is what Lingoda offers at its best. Your personal or group teacher will be available at any time to respond to your queries and concerns.

Download for free study materials – It happens to you that in a certain moment you cannot finish reading a piece of your study material, you can download it for free and give it a read once you’re available.

Prepare for Language Proficiency Exams – Its unique teaching approach and its elegant conveyance makes it a perfect choice for those students who are working to sit on a language proficiency exam like TestDAF, TOEFL or IELTS.

Disadvantages

You cannot choose your professor – There’s only a single minor disadvantage with Lingoda(at least until now), you cannot decide which professor will be assigned to your course. But this won’t represent a big problem and in fact, may soon turn into a benefit to you because you’ll get the chance to teach with another professor and know other people.

4.0. Conclusion

Increasingly popular, distance education has been researched from many angles, but studies done from a cultural analytic perspective are rare. Most studies up to this point have focused on the pedagogical perspective. This thesis aims to investigate challenges faced by different stakeholders in distance education, including online course promoters, teachers, and students, from a cultural analytic perspective. According to empirical materials, I would suggest that various gaps exist in asynchronous online courses which go unnoticed, but which greatly impede student learning performance. These gaps exist in all areas of distance education, including: the sensory experience, online communication, between mind and body as well as the assumptions and expectations for and knowledge of distance education. If these gaps were reduced, distance education would be more effective and appealing.

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