

Brno Texts:

1) Laura:

VC learning experience

In this essay, I am going to express my opinion on the 'Videoconferencing in English' lessons, based on my experience of it. = Compared to normal English language lessons, many differences could be found, but I will only show three of them.

Firstly, the number of people in the VC group was noticeably lower than in normal English classes, leading to better understanding of the discussed topics. More chances to express own opinions and speak. Last, but not least the professor could pay more? attention to every one of us and help us to improve.

Secondly, we had the chance to speak with people of other countries and cultures whereas in normal English classes, usually there are only people of the same nationality or similar language, because they need to understand the teacher who is explaining the curriculum. This leads me to the third point.

During the normal lessons, often only grammar or tenses are taught, while in VC lessons, we had the chance to learn more. Academic writing and how to do it correctly was one of these things. We were also given the chance to communicate through videoconference and discuss some really interesting topics which concern our society nowadays.

To summarize, the VC lesson is more productive and interesting than normal English lessons (that are) offered to us in the school. We are able to learn more, because of the teacher's attitude and communication opportunities. 2) Issis

An Innovative Way for Learning Enrichment

Lately technology has become a lot more developed and refined, enabling many different activities people could not have dreamed of a couple years ago; for instance, talking to someone who might be miles away from a specific area. The effect of this is that teaching

practices have had to change and advance according to the new tools the world offers. Hence, videoconferencing, as one of the new technological strategies for education especially language learning, offers a variety of advantages for students including time/travel flexibility and international diversity, targeting mainly the improvement of students' abilities within their field of study.

As internet usage nowadays, videoconferencing enables communication between different subjects without the interference of time, distance or expenses barriers; promoting -within education- knowledge-sharing from different parts of the globe,. Thus, through this strategy countries such as Honduras, Georgia, South Korea, Czech Republic can gather together to discuss important matters in real time and miles away from each other without paying a single euro other than the expected cost of the internet provider.

Besides the lack of expense, the diversity of cultural learning is an experience that provides great motivation for an upcoming scholarship in students, as it is a stimulating way of receiving classes. Moreover, videoconferencing enhances not only the knowledge that we are aiming to develop but also performance skills such as speaking in public, which becomes much easier in a videoconferencing setting since the impact of emotional reaction is less powerful from the screen than an actual physical presence. Therefore, an introverted person may feel less intimidated by the picture projected on the screen than a real life audience.

Furthermore, not only gaining self-confidence by speaking exposure, but some other benefits, videoconferencing is comprised of a great number of advantages including technological knowledge, cultural diversity, sharing for a broaden enrichment of scholarship intended to be acquired, overcoming time and space barriers to provide students with the necessary motivation from an interconnected educational world experience.



### 3) Sasa

The course 'Videoconferencing in English' provided a unique combination of theory and practice, where one did not dominate the other, but rather complimented each other – a result aspired to in many courses, but seldom actually achieved.

The theoretical part had the usual form of a lecturer transferring knowledge, but what set it apart from most courses is that the student input was always requested and valued. This allowed students an attempt to find their own solutions to the problem before them, and whether they succeeded or failed, it enhanced their interest in the material, as well as their levels of familiarity and understanding of it. The variety of teaching materials used- mainly oral lectures, written exercises and video material - not only helped to further increase attention levels, but also corresponded with different individual learning styles and student preferences. Furthermore, the knowledge gained on this course is not limited to this course alone, rather, it is applicable to academic and as well as less formal uses.

The practical part of the class is unlike any other both in terms of topics discussed and the discussion environment. Rather than artificial, monotonous classroom exercises, this course provided real life communication challenges in nearly all aspects of language: speaking, listening and writing. Speaking was a challenge due to differences in participant language proficiency levels, as well as time limitations; listening was a challenge due to pronunciation variations and fluency levels and, occasionally, prior subject knowledge; writing was a challenge due to specific formal academic style requirements. Discussions themselves offered a valuable experience in terms of general knowledge and overcoming stereotypes through raising awareness of practices and beliefs of different cultures, not only Asian, but also European. Participants had an opportunity to acquaint themselves with several very different countries and practices by being presented both with personal and traditional values, whether through moral questions, different ceremonies, recipes or social roles.

Another very useful aspect of this course was the constant feedback, whether it was spontaneous through the facial and verbal reactions of the Aberystwyth students , or deliberate and more elaborate as provided by the teacher. Furthermore, a unique characteristic of this course is the fact that the videoconferences were recorded, which provides the students with an opportunity to self-evaluate (their behaviour), be their own judges and determine their strong and weak points.

To conclude, Videoconferencing in English course provided knowledge not only specific to the academic environment, but also everyday life; not only about other cultures, but our own; not only about other people, but ourselves and therefore was a highly valuable learning experience?

#### 4) Lucie

Videoconference – an innovative way of learning English

The 'Videoconferencing in English' course provided a unique opportunity for the attendants to encounter a nonstandard way of learning the language through videoconference sessions with students from another overseas university, more specifically from Aberystwyth University, Wales.

Concerning the participation criteria, the course was destined for all students with no distinction in relation to the type and the domain of their studies. Moreover, no precise English language level was required for the attendance. What is of significant importance is that the course was offered not only to official Masaryk University students , but also to the exchange and Erasmus students. This enabled the participants to compare their

experiences, forced communication in English (because the majority of the audience had different mother tongues) and broadened their knowledge of different cultural backgrounds (including traditions, different accents or famous persons). The working group was comprised of students not merely from Europe (primarily Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Slovaks) but also from more distant Central America. What is rather interesting is the fact that only one student came from the home country (the Czech Republic).

During the course, the attendants drew attention, besides other things, to the formal aspects of English. In writing assignments, they attempted to improve their level of academic English with proper pronunciation and adequate style vis-à-vis the particular audience and circumstances. The reading tasks mainly focused on searching for appropriate background information for later class discussions. Even though the writing and reading tasks were important, the course structure was related to the videoconference sessions being principally oriented to speaking and listening. Concerning speaking skills, students expressed their opinions and ideas not only in spontaneous discussions but they also had to prepare some general information related to pre-specified topics. Moreover, one of the tasks was to conduct the whole videoconference session with Aberystwyth University, including the choice of topic, preparation and its subsequent presentation and discussion. Regarding listening skills, students were obliged to concentrate and adapt to specific accents of other participants (mainly to those coming from Asia which may sometimes prove difficult) and be ready to respond.

Nevertheless, the main contribution of the course was most certainly the intercultural exchange between the attendants. Coming from different cultural and social surroundings, they could present their opinions and possibly change the point of view of the others on some controversial topics. Although it is not always easy to accept another's opinion, it certainly helps to increase/promote tolerance and mutual respect which is more crucial

than the factual knowledge of English and proves that courses like this are of significant importance these days.

## 5) Justinas

The aim of this paper is to compare the lessons of Videoconferencing in English to normal ones and to discern/describe/outline the former's advantages and disadvantages. The text will be based on my own experience on this course.

First of all, there seems to be no reason to argue that nowadays while technologies are being improved very fast, it is obvious that typical lessons have become more boring and people want to include some "smart" things into their studies. Some of these new technologies have been found in the/our 'Videoconferencing in English' lessons. It is necessary to mention that the opportunity to talk with students from the United Kingdom during video call sessions was great (assuming that the video and audio quality was better than expected). This implies that the lessons went smoothly, were exciting and not so boring.

Secondly, communicating with other people who are not native English speakers puts forward the view that it is a good experience for getting use to their accent and trying to speak fluently. Another relevant point is that working and communicating in groups makes people flexible and more able to solve problems. Also, it persuades students to focus on what others says, thus increasing their level of attention. What is more, videoconferencing lessons, unlike the normal ones, include more practical aspects, not only writing and reading. That is to say, oral lectures were the main thing on this course, whereas on a normal English grammar course written exercises form a large part.

In addition, comparing videoconferencing lessons to normal ones, another difference was the amount of students. At VC most of the time there were from four to eight students unlike in normal English grammar lessons where there are usually about twenty. This experience proves that lessons with fewer people, make it easier to focus on the topic and concentrate.



In summary, the 'Videoconferencing in English' course is mostly about practical learning, which is very useful. It is clear from the above that this kind of lecture is more attractive to students to learn and for teachers to teach as well. Considering my own experience, it is clear that lessons like this are the future of studying.

## 6) Michaela

Videoconferencing is a modern method of communication in the 20th -21<sup>st</sup> century. Learning methods are changing every year and using "VC" is just the next step in making our lives easier. Videoconferencing uses audio and video systems to bring people at different sites together.

The videoconferencing lessons composed of different cultural groups at our university. During the lessons we had an opportunity to meet new international students and get to know their cultures, habits and statements. Personally, from time to time it was difficult to differentiate between the foreign accents and misunderstandings consequently emerged. But in my opinion it was great experience in my life. Videoconferencing is the future for everybody from our lesson and our generation.

## 7) Iryna

### Videoconferencing Learning Experience

Videoconferencing has been used at Masaryk University for years, but now it is gaining more popularity and this particular course made it possible to meet, learn and work with fellow students from Aberystwyth University and around the world. Other advantages are that videoconferencing not only enables meetings that would be otherwise impossible due to travel expenses, but also increases learning productivity, motivation and promotes teamwork.

Unlike traditional classes, videoconferencing abolishes geographical borders. In an instant the course 'Videoconferencing in English' made it possible to gather students of more than ten nationalities and cultures in the same virtual 'classroom'. Due to the fact that there are considerably fewer people in class, videoconferencing engages everyone with no exceptions in a discussion. Thus, while participating in a videoconference students learn to articulate their thoughts more clearly and practise their public speaking skills. On the other hand, such cultural diversity creates certain challenges; students are exposed to a variety of accents, which vary among representatives of every country. Not being used to the speed and manner of speech of each other, learners employ note-taking, which promotes active listening and helps to record and summarize information for future reference.

One of the other obvious benefits of videoconferencing classes at Masaryk University in comparison to traditional ones is the fact that videoconferences are always recorded. This gives students an opportunity to go back and observe the typical mistakes they make while communicating in English at a later date. Furthermore, feedback is immediately provided by the teacher after every class, which allows students to critically assess their progress.

All things considered, the course 'Videoconferencing in English' provided a unique opportunity to participate in collaborative activities with students coming from different

cultural as well as educational backgrounds. Conjoined efforts of the people engaged along with the usage of audio and visual contact have served as a powerful tool for improving English language skills and developing cultural awareness.

## 8) Olga

I want to share with you an experience I've recently had. For the last 3 months nearly every week I have had a videoconference with exchange students at one of the British Universities. first it's useful to start with some pre-course information.

Being an exchange student I had to choose several subjects which correspond to my home studies. To tell the truth, this subject had nothing to do with them – they were quite an innovation for me – and this was what attracted me most. Consequently I chose this VC course, having not even the slightest idea/clue of how it might/could work.

I would like to admit that I liked the first class a lot! Although I was in a panic looking for the room, as a famous proverb goes, the end justified the means. Finally, I found the room and it looked so professional! Believe it or not, I at once started longing to study. The table, the curtain, the screen, the camera – all the facilities looked so inspiring. Then(don't consider it as flattery) I heard a professor's speech – and it invigorated me even more. His speech sounded so confident and so British that I even tried to copy it (of course without success).

From the first session of Videoconference I understood that it's very important not only to speak articulately, but to behave properly and to keep an eye on your personal movements whilst talking. Moreover, I realized that my style of speaking was far from perfect. Certainly I was disappointed – but it only motivated me to further practice.

Furthermore, I liked the opportunity to speak about essential topics such as women's rights, euthanasia, governmental policy and others – topics about which I am not sure I have even had a conversation in my native language. Communicating on these mature issues makes people more responsible, reliable and rational. If not taking into consideration my own personal speaking skills, I was pleased to have an opportunity to listen to other students. The farther they were from my culture – the more interesting it

was. Although, unfortunately, it wasn't always understandable when they spoke (I hope this was due to technical reasons), some students were very straightforward and very persuasive. Several times I even thought to myself that I have more things in common with the Asian people rather than with Europeans – and it was a very surprising discovery.

Frankly speaking, the best thing about participating in videoconferencing is that you can take a look at yourself and judge your speech no strings attached. To cut a long story short, I appreciate the course a lot and I am grateful to the professor for conducting such international conferences.

## 9) Dovile

### VIDEOCONFERENCING LEARNING EXPERIENCE

'Videoconferencing in English' is an extraordinary course that provides a great opportunity for the students to participate in diverse methods of foreign language learning.

First of all, the aim of this course is to advance students speaking skills with other students from Aberystwyth University (UK) via videoconference sessions. Enrolled international students bring different backgrounds, interests and experience(s) to this course. Attendants introduce each other's cultures, participate in discussions that are prepared in advance and thus improve their speaking skills?. What is more, students usually work in groups that help them to go around with students from Lithuania, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Slovak, Honduras, Bosnia, Georgia, South Korea and Japan.

Second, this course is slightly different and more innovative than any other regular course that can be found in universities these days. For example, discussion topics are posted online, on a special Facebook group that is created for this course. Every week students meet in a small classroom that is equipped with higher-quality cameras, a large screen, and faster compression for sending the video signal, allowing for two-way interaction. Besides this, every session is recorded which allows the opportunity to listen to the sessions again, and notice and learn mistakes that were made.

Given these facts demonstrate videoconferencing in English is a course that enlightens students in a different way than regular lessons. It is important to mention that the skills gained will assist students in their future social life and academic environment.

10) Karin

"Videoconferencing Learning Experience"

The course 'Videoconferencing in English' give me a totally new perspective of how a course could be held. I really liked the way how was come to an end., which was that the onus was mainly on us to choice topics for the next week. We picked topics that you do not usually think about in private or free time. Consequently, we needed to creat certain opinion according to the chosen topic for homework .This created opinion we shared with other schoolmates and co-speakers. This demand full participation. And the result of full participation is getting as much as you can from the course.

We discuss different social, cultural and historical questions. One of the first topics after our short introduction was national and cultural heroines. This was an interesting, unusual topic that took some searching, because usually heroes tend to be masculine in gender. Guessing about Justinas' heroines Rūta Meilutytė was surprising. Everybody thought that she is student fighter for woman rights, an actress or a singer. But she is a Lithuanian swimmer., I will definitely recognize and remember her now.

After this topic followed a discussion about access to our privacy by the government, about whetherthe government should be able to enter into our private service for security needs. Opinions were different. Some of us were of the opinion that if you do not have anything to hide there should not be concern for any of us. Others were of the opinion that every human being has a right to their privacy.

On one of our courses we also argued about animals rights and if plastic surgery should be banned. Almost everyone were opinion that there is no need to ban plastic surgery advetisements. We should respect everyone's taste and it is up to us to do as we wish with our own bodies. Also, about animals we had more or less the same opinions. Animals



cannot speak for themselves, so it is our duty to treat them nicely and ensure that they are not exploited for capitalistic purposes. The following hours spending together nice debate has developed about euthanasia and abortion and whether they should be allowed as a human right.

In conclusion, the Course involved lively debate. Because we were filmed during videoconferencing we now have a great opportunity to analyze how we behave and react in front of the camera. This course will stay in my memory.