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# Language Teaching at a Distance: An Overview of Research

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**ABSTRACT:**

In this paper, we review empirical research on language teaching at a distance, published between 2005 and 2010. After compiling a list of journals, we went through a multi-stage process of analyzing relevant studies. This overview of research is based on twenty-four articles. The content analysis of research studies led our inquiry on topics researched in distance language teaching in 2005-2010: types of contexts, learners, languages, and technologies targeted in the empirical research during this period of time; trends in methodological choices; and lessons we can learn from the conducted research studies. We then discuss the implications of the gaps in research literature on language teaching at a distance and provide suggestions for future directions in empirical inquiry.

## LANGUAGE TEACHING AT A DISTANCE

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the recent research on second/foreign language (L2/FL) teaching in distance education (DE). Because of globalization and the rapid development of technology throughout the world, obtaining K-12 and higher education degrees has become possible and more convenient via DE. DE is defined as "planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements" (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 2). The term "distance education" also embraces many types of learning and teaching, such as open learning,[1] distributed learning,[2] and networked learning[3] (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004).

Currently, an increasing number of institutions throughout the world are beginning to offer purely web-based, web-enhanced, and/or blended courses (Kraemer, 2008). Compared to traditional face-to-face classes, DE offers flexibility of time, place, space, and pace (Florida Virtual School, n.d.), which allows learners who cannot attend a traditional classroom (due to distance, time, or any other reason) to join the student population (see Gustke, 2010).

Like many other disciplines, second and foreign language courses are now being offered at a distance (Kraemer, 2008). The use of technology in language teaching has received considerable attention (Fidaoui, Bahous, & Bacha, 2010; Kucuk, Genc-Kumtepe, & Tasci, 2010). Unsurprisingly, not all research on the use of technology in second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language education deals with L2 teaching and learning via DE. Though a considerable number of research studies found that it is possible to get the same (or even

better) results in DE classes as in the traditional, face-to-face context (Reuter, 2009), many questions arise in reference to L2 teaching: Is it possible to teach an L2 or FL at a distance? What do educators need to know about the difference in context and mode of delivery? Which instructional strategies are most effective in such classes? How should language teachers develop materials and assess students in distance education classes? This list of questions is not complete as every educator with a goal of developing a successful online course on L2 or FL will have numerous questions on how to make the course as effective as possible.

As former English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, English as a second language (ESL) educators, and researchers, we intend to review the recent studies on L2 teaching in DE in order to find answers to the questions above. With this paper, we aim to show the recent development of research on L2/FL teaching at a distance and, hopefully, to enhance further inquiry into the matter. This paper will complement the article by Blake (2009) with its specific target on teaching L2/FL via DE. In addition, it will provide educators with an overview of research findings and give them ideas on how to improve their language teaching at a distance (LTDE). Finally, this paper will discuss the gaps in the research literature and offer suggestions for future research in language teaching in distance education.

The following research questions led our inquiry:
1. Which areas within LTDE have been researched over the period 2005-2010?
2. Which types of context have been targeted to study language teaching via DE?
3. Which languages have been targeted to study language teaching via DE?
4. Which types of learners have been targeted to study language teaching via DE?
5. Which technologies have been used in the studies on LTDE?
6. What methodology was applied in the studies on LTDE?
7. What are the findings of empirical studies on LTDE?

## METHOD

The target area of interest in this review covers SLA, foreign language education, and DE, which made the search for relevant studies more complicated and more interesting. We believe that interdisciplinary studies frequently generate a fantastic collaboration between researchers, and such studies offer valuable findings for the fields involved that single-discipline endeavors may not achieve. In the search for relevant articles for our literature review, we first compiled a list of 16 target journals. We then identified all relevant empirical studies that met our criteria for this paper.

### *Selecting Representative Journals*

The selection of journals to review for the relevant studies on teaching languages via DE was based on the findings of Smith and Lafford (2009). In their study, the researchers identified the "top 14 CALL-specific and Applied Linguistics/SLA journals" (p. 878). We added two other journals that did not appear in Smith and Lafford (2009), but were included as top journals in Egbert (2007). The 16 journals reviewed for the purpose of this paper are in alphabetical order:
- Applied Linguistics
- CALICO Journal
- Canadian Modern Language Review
- Computer Assisted Language Learning
- English Language Teaching Journal
- Foreign Language Annals
- International Review of Applied Linguistics
- Journal of Second Language Writing
- Language Learning
- Language Learning & Technology

- Language Testing
- ReCALL
- Studies in Second Language Acquisition
- System
- TESOL Quarterly
- The Modern Language Journal

### *Selecting Relevant Studies*

Having identified the journals, we created the following list of criteria to guide our selection of articles:

1. The article had to be an empirical study.
2. The article had to focus on LTDE.
3. The article had to have been published between 2005 and 2010.

We did not include literature reviews, position papers, and other types of articles that were not empirical studies, though we certainly acknowledge the value of non-empirical publications. At the same time, studies on language teaching with technology in face-to-face classes and on the use of technology to enhance language learning were not included.

We based our selection on a review of article titles and abstracts and found 24 articles that warranted a more detailed analysis. Figure 1 indicates the distribution of articles by journal. As Figure 1 shows, most empirical studies on LTDE that met our selection criteria were published in the *CALICO Journal* (7 articles), in *Computer Assisted Language Learning* (6 articles), and *ReCALL* (4 articles).

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of articles over time. Though this paper is not intended to provide an overview of the historical development of research on LTDE, the distribution of journals over time may enhance the understanding of the context and the state of the current research on the topic under review. According to Figure 2, most of the relevant empirical studies on language teaching via DE were published in 2005 (6 articles), 2008 (5 articles), and 2009 (5 articles).

Figure 1
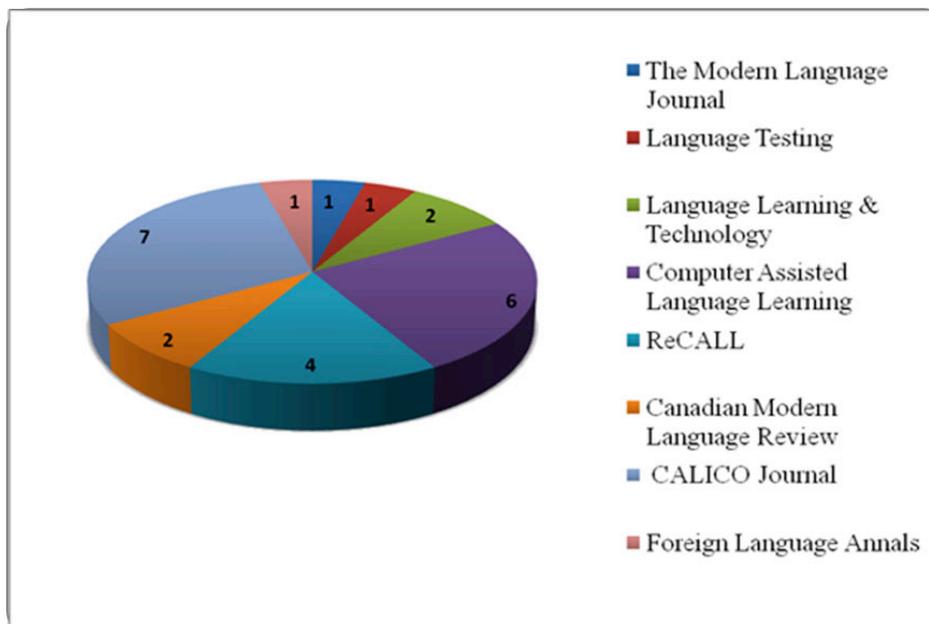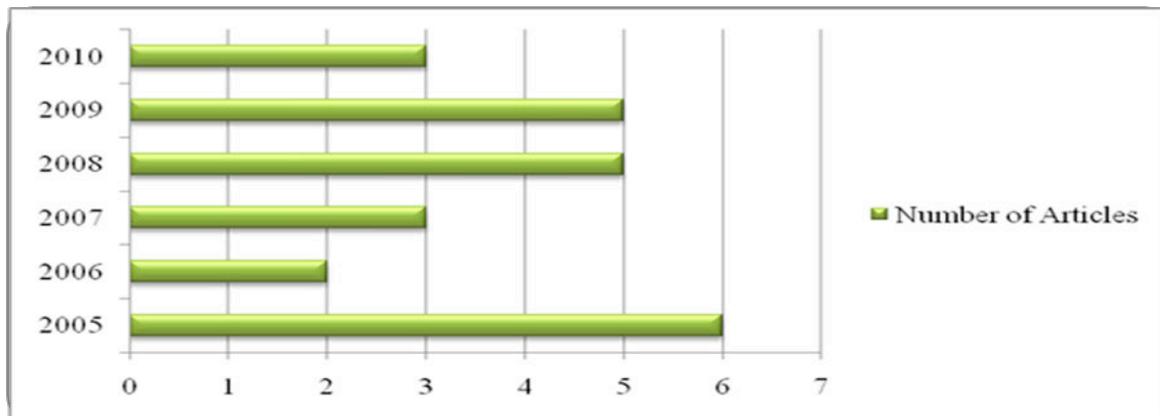Distribution of Articles by Journal

Figure 2
Distribution of Articles over Time



### Analysis of Articles

First, we determined the target topic(s) of each article. If an article addressed two or more different topics, we included that article under all of those topics. Further, we analyzed the data in terms of learner populations and contexts targeted in the studies on LTDE. In particular, we focused on the age category of the learners. We also searched for the technologies that were used in DE language courses. Finally, the studies were analyzed in terms of methodological choices and lessons learned.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Target Topics

The selected empirical studies on LTDE focused on various topics (see Table 1). In particular, most studies have targeted various types of conferencing, issues of assessment, and task design. Based on the number of studies, a blended mode of delivery and telecollaboration ranks second. The broader focus on synchronous language teaching appeared in two studies, which, together with audiographic/videoconferencing studies, reveal the prevalence of researchers' inquiry into synchronous language teaching issues. Surprisingly, the asynchronous format did not receive such attention. Though several studies focused on language courses at a distance with asynchronous elements (Blake, Wilson, Cetto, & Pardo-Ballester, 2008; Brudermann, 2010), they were not the focus of our inquiry.

Table 1
Thematic Foci

| Topic | Study |
| --- | --- |
| A/V-conferencing | Acar (2007); Guichon (2010); Rosell-Aguilar (2005); Wang (2007) |
| Assessment | Baturay and Daloğlu (2010); Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008); Larson and Hendricks (2009); Roever (2005) |
| Task design | Hampel (2006); O'Dowd and Waire (2009); Rosell-Aguilar (2005); Wang (2007) |
| Blended delivery | Baňados (2006); Brudermann (2010); Young (2008) |
| Telecollaboration | Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008); O'Dowd and Waire (2009); Ware and Kramsch (2005) |
| Face-to-face comparison | Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008); Harker and Koutsantoni (2005) |
| E-learning | Coryell and Chlup (2007); Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008) |
| Oral participation | Deutschmann, Panichi, and Molka-Danielsen (2009); Rosell-Aguilar (2005) |
| Synchronous LT | Guichon (2010); Hampel (2006) |
| L2 writing | Hsieh and Liou (2009); Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008) |
| Perceptions | Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008); Murday, Ushida, and Chenoweth (2008) |
| Pragmatic competence | Roever (2005) |
| Evaluation | Madyarov (2009) |
| Effective courses | Don (2005) |
| Teacher participation | Ene, Görtler, and McBride (2005) |
| Online tutorial practice | Brudermann (2010) |
| Teachers' challenges | Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008) |

The 17 target topics found in the empirical studies can be further grouped in broader categories: types of language course delivery at a distance, instructional design, and teacher/learner attitudes and perceptions. The types of language course delivery embrace some studies on various types of conferencing, including synchronous language teaching, blended language courses, telecollaboration, e-learning, and comparison of face-to-face, blended, and/or online language courses. Furthermore, the instructional design category can include task design, assessment, design of students' oral participation, L2 writing, L2 pragmalinguistic competence, evaluation of distance language courses, characteristics of effective language courses online, teacher participation styles, and online tutorial practice. Finally, teacher/learner attitudes and perceptions can include teacher and/or student attitudes and perceptions as well as teachers' challenges based on their reflections. Such categorization of teaching language at a distance constitutes only a rough estimate: many studies on the topics have overlapping foci and belong to different topics and, thus, could be classified in more than one category.

**Target Contexts**

Most of the selected empirical studies focused on teaching FL at a distance (see Table 2); 81% of these studies investigated foreign language courses, while only 5 articles studied L2

teaching in DE courses. Therefore, there exists an evident lack of empirical research on teaching second language courses at a distance.

Table 2
Target Contexts

| Target context | Study |
| --- | --- |
| Foreign language context | Acar (2007); Baňados (2006); Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008); Baturay and Daloğlu (2010); Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008); Brudermann (2010); Deutschmann, Panichi, and Molka-Danielsen (2009); Don (2005); Ene, Görtler, and McBride (2005); Guichon (2010); Hampel (2006); Hsieh and Liou (2009); Larson and Hendricks (2009); Madyarov (2009); Murday, Ushida, and Chenoweth (2008); O'Dowd and Waire (2009); Roever (2005); Rosell-Aguilar (2005); Wang (2007); Ware and Kramsch (2005); Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008); Young (2008) |
| Second language context | Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008); Coryell and Chlup (2007); Harker and Koutsantoni (2005); Roever (2005); Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008) |

Teaching a foreign language differs significantly from teaching a second language. We believe that such difference may be explained by contextual factors. For example, in a foreign language context, students are not immersed daily in the language they are learning. Teaching a foreign language, therefore, should afford maximum opportunities for students' participation and interaction in a target language in order to provide learners with sufficient opportunities for learning.

### Target Languages

As can be seen in Table 3, most empirical research focused on English (13 articles) and Spanish (7 articles) as a L2/FL. The next most frequently targeted languages in the selected articles were German and French, found in 3 and 2 studies respectively. Finally, distance courses in Chinese and Turkish as a FL were investigated in one study each. It is important to note that several studies researched involved teaching two languages. Our findings support the study by Wang and Vasquez (in press) on Web 2.0 and language learning as we also find that ESL/EFL, Spanish, German, and French were targeted the most and ranked in the same order according to the number of studies.

Table 3
Target Languages in Empirical Studies on Teaching Languages at a Distance

| Target language | Study |
|---|---|
| English | Baňados (2006); Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008); Baturay and Daloğlu (2010); Brudermann (2010); Coryell and Chlup (2007); Deutschmann, Panichi, and Molka-Danielsen (2009); Harker and Koutsantoni (2005); Hsieh and Liou (2009); Madyarov (2009); O'Dowd and Waire (2009); Roever (2005); Ware and Kramsch (2005); Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008) |
| Spanish | Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008); Don (2005); Larson and Hendricks (2009); Murday, Ushida, and Chenoweth (2008); O'Dowd and Waire (2009); Rosell-Aguilar (2005); Young (2008) |
| German | Ene, Görtler, and McBride (2005); Hampel (2006); Ware and Kramsch (2005) |
| French | Guichon (2010); Murday, Ushida, and Chenoweth (2008) |
| Turkish | Acar (2007) |
| Chinese | Wang (2007) |

### Target Learners

To our surprise, out of the 24 studies selected for this paper, only one involved language learners in a high school setting (Roever, 2005); the remaining studies focused on adult learners. Therefore, further research that targets LTDE in K-12 settings is urgently needed, especially given the existence of DE courses at schools in the United States (http://www.k12.com/what-is-k12).

### Technology Used for Language Teaching via DE

Though the selected empirical studies did not focus on technology itself, but only described or mentioned the technology used in the LTDE, we decided to record the types of technology used (see Table 4).

Table 4
Technology Used for LTDE

| Type of technology | Study | # |
|---|---|---|
| *Course management* | | |
| WebCT | Basharina, Guardado, and Morgan (2008); Murday, Ushida, and Chenoweth (2008) | 2 |
| Blackboard | Ware and Kramsch (2005); Young (2008) | 2 |
| Moodle | Hsieh and Liou (2009); Madyarov (2009) | 2 |
| CLIPS | Larson and Hendricks (2009) | 1 |
| *Conferencing* | | |
| Skype | Guichon (2010) | 1 |
| Visu | Guichon (2010) | 1 |
| Lyceum | Hampel (2006); Rosell-Aguilar (2005) | 2 |
| NetMeeting | Wang (2007) | 1 |

| IRC Français chat | Ene, Görtler, and McBride (2005) | 1 |
|---|---|---|
| *Web 2.0 applications* | | |
| Blog | Guichon (2010) | 1 |
| POWER | Hsieh and Liou (2009) | 1 |
| CARE | Hsieh and Liou (2009) | 1 |
| Concept Tracker | Larson and Hendricks (2009) | 1 |
| UdeC English Online | Baňados (2006) | 1 |
| "Online pedag. asst." | Brudermann (2010) | 1 |
| Second Life | Deutschmann, Panichi, and Molka-Danielsen (2009) | 1 |

As course management software, WebCT, Blackboard, Moodle, and the CLIPS were mentioned. In addition, various conferencing tools, such as the IRC Français chat program, Skype, Visu, Lyceum, and NetMeeting, were used. As for specific language software and Web 2.0 applications, the studies included language courses using UdeC English Online, POWER (Peer Online Writing and Editing Room), CARE (Concordancer of Academic Written English), an "online pedagogical assistant" for blended learning, Second Life, and blogs. In addition, Concept Tracker, a testlet editor, JavaScript, and HTML were used as tools for test development.[4]

### Methodological Approaches

We distinguish quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. While quantitative research applies objective measurement and statistical analysis of data in order to answer a research question (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006), qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world through the analysis of field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The mixed methods approach involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures in sequential or parallel stages (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Nearly the same number of studies followed quantitative and qualitative approaches with much fewer studies employing mixed methods (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Methodological Approaches
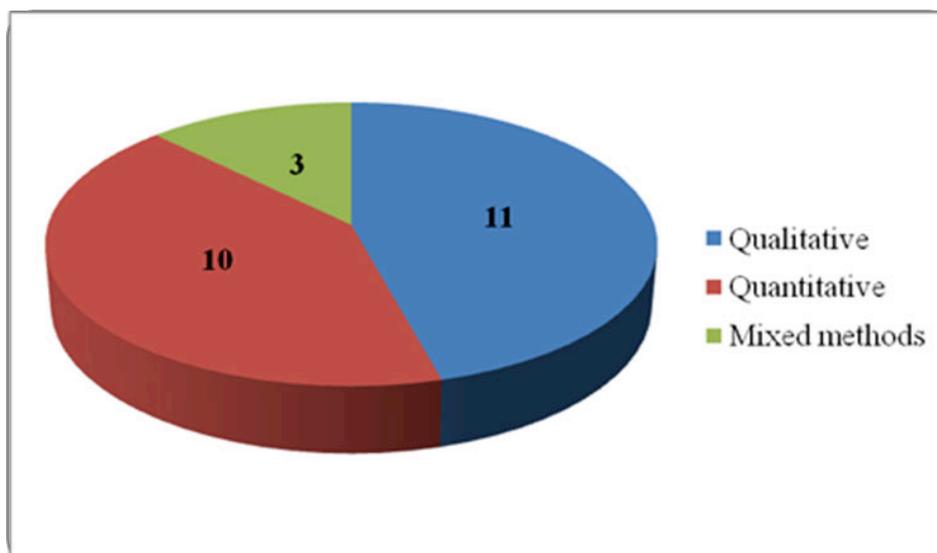
### Lessons Learned: Research Findings on Teaching Languages at a Distance

In this section, we comment on various issues in distance language education: course design, e-learning, evaluation of distance language courses, and the development of academic writing courses. Then, we focus on task design, telecollaborative task design, conferencing, and assessment.

Many of the selected studies focused on various distance language course design issues. Their findings shed light on what educators do to make their LTDE more effective. As a result, Coryell and Chlup (2007) conducted a study to explore the effective implementation of e-learning adult ESL courses across the United States. The researchers employed two open-ended survey instruments (one for directors and one for instructors) and collected written responses from 15 instructors and 4 directors from 11 states. The data showed that 35 different software programs, websites, and course management systems were used in the participants' programs and/or courses. The findings indicate that teachers' preparation, collaboration, individualized student-centered instruction and support are crucial for the successful implementation of e-learning elements for adult language learners.

Don (2005) investigated the characteristics of effective online courses. The researcher collected survey data (an expert survey and a student survey) in Spanish online classes. Twenty-one experts in Spanish instruction (instructors and course developers) and 28 students participated in the study. Based on the collected data, the five characteristics of effective online FL courses include clear instructions, student-instructor contact, four-language skills inclusion (e.g. speaking, listening, reading, and writing), audio components, and student-student interaction. The findings of the two studies described above agree on the importance of teacher preparation and student collaboration and discuss what can be done to enhance distance language teaching.

Madyarov (2009) investigated the application of a framework for the evaluation of an online EFL course at a Middle Eastern university. The findings of his study show that the crucial elements in the evaluation of distance foreign language courses include student support in the online context, quality of interaction among tutors and students, usability of the course materials online, assignments and grading procedures specific to online context, and expectations for the students' workload. The researcher points out the high value of students' feedback gathered through formative evaluation instruments, such as journals, module surveys, and discussions in forums. Madyarov's (2009) study complements the studies by Coryell and Chlup (2007) and Don (2005) in terms of the examination of successful course components and the information on the implementation of an evaluation framework for online foreign language teaching.

Several studies compared the efficacy of distance language courses in various formats with face-to-face courses (Harker & Koutsantoni, 2005; Murday et al., 2008; Young, 2008). Online FL language courses yield a higher level of students' satisfaction over time compared to the face-to-face courses (Murday et al., 2008). In addition, students in purely online and blended, or hybrid, foreign language classes achieve the same level of oral proficiency as in the traditional classes (Blake et al., 2008). On the other hand, when comparing online and blended formats of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, the blended format was more effective than its online alternative in terms of student retention; however, the students' results and level of satisfaction in both courses were similar (Harker & Koutsantoni, 2005). Finally, Young (2008) found that the effectiveness of language courses in DE formats greatly depends on the instructors' pedagogical effectiveness.

The development of **distance writing courses** was the focus of studies by Hsieh and Liou (2009) and Xing et al. (2008). Hsieh and Liou investigated the application of the analysis of research studies abstracts in the development of online course content specifically for

teaching abstract writing to EFL graduate students in applied linguistics. The authors in-cluded 50 research article abstracts from the journal article abstract corpus and 50 confer-ence paper abstracts from the conference paper abstract corpus in the development of the course and online materials. Peer Online Writing and Editing Room (POWER) was used for the learners' synchronous online peer review because it combined the advantages of a chat room and a document management tool. The findings of their study show that a corpus-based approach to the design of online materials had a positive impact on the development of students' academic writing.

The focus of Xing et al. (2008) was English rhetoric in an EFL distance academic writing course. The e-course, with materials contrasting rhetorical features of English and Chinese, allowed students to achieve native-like performance. Furthermore, the provision of the e-learning resources and context contributed to students' comparisons of rhetorical styles across cultures and academic writing in general. Thus, with a thorough consideration of software affordances and constraints, careful selection of technology, and characteristics of context, language courses at a distance can be effective and can offer a range of specific possibilities for developing academic writing at a distance.

Another focus of empirical research studies was **task design** (Deutschmann et al., 2009; Hampel, 2006; O'Dowd & Waire, 2009). Using an action research approach, Deutschmann et al. (2009) investigated the design of oral participation of two subsequent oral proficiency EFL courses in the virtual world Second Life. Through the analysis of four 90-minute ses-sions, studying floor space, turn lengths, and turn-taking patterns, the researchers found that authenticity and collaboration in meaning-focused task design directly influenced stu-dents' engagement and participation. In addition, course design should include students' introduction to the Second Life environment, both technically and socially.

Hampel (2006) discussed the implementation of a framework for task development in a synchronous online environment for language teaching and learning. Hampel showed how SLA principles and sociocultural theory can influence task design in distance language classes at the Open University. The findings of the study indicate that in order to success-fully implement tasks online, it is crucial to consider flexibility of the software, its affor-dances, and constraints. Thus, the context itself, as well as the characteristics of the soft-ware used for LTDE, figure importantly in task design. They should be considered and implemented in the introduction section to familiarize students with the environment, but also in terms of the development of other tasks and the overall course design.

**Telecollaborative task design** was the subject of studies by Basharina et al. (2008) and O'Dowd and Waire (2009). Basharina et al.'s study explored three instructors' reflections through written narratives on the ESL/EFL telecollaboration project among students in Can-ada, Russia, and Mexico. The authors focused primarily on the challenges the instructors encountered while implementing and facilitating telecollaboration tasks. The major difficul-ties the instructors faced were differences in instructors' approaches to the project, in view-ing the instructor's role, enhancement of students' participation, and instructors' interac-tions. Such challenges appeared to be sorted in the constraints and affordances of the context and differences in instructors' teaching philosophies. The findings may serve as an excellent guide for language educators in terms of what to consider before designing tasks involving telecollaboration.

In the case study on issues in telecollaborative task design, O'Dowd and Waire (2009) in-vestigated telecollaborative exchanges between learners of Spanish and English as foreign languages. The findings indicate that the differences in teachers' views on the task had a significant impact on the dynamics of the development of students' interaction and led to the problems in students' correspondence. Through the instructors' cooperation, compro-

mise, and involvement, the project ended successfully in terms of development of the language learners' fluency and promotion of their independence.

Furthermore, differences in the amount and nature of teachers' virtual presence in chat was shown to influence learners' chat behavior in German as a FL course (Ene et al., 2005). Moreover, one of the teachers focused on form during her participation, which inhibited learners' participation. The students reported that while they appreciated the instructor's input and corrective feedback, the instructor's participation and presence made them self-conscious. This does not mean, however, that the teachers' participation should be minimized. When Ware and Kramsch (2005) investigated the misunderstanding in intercultural communication between students from Germany and the United States, they found the teachers' role in assuming an intercultural stance as pivotal. Thus, teachers' presence, participation styles, and approaches to learners' independence are crucial in telecollaborative tasks design and may account for the success or difficulties with their implementation and facilitation.

Various types of **conferencing,** such as video- or audiographic, also received attention (Acar, 2007; Rosell-Aguilar, 2005; Wang, 2007). For instance, a high degree of students' interaction at remote sites turned out to be crucial for multipoint conferencing (Acar, 2007). As for effectiveness based on students' proficiency in a L2, conferencing tasks were found to be suitable for students at all levels of foreign language proficiency (assuming the proper design or selection of materials) (Rosell-Aguilar, 2005). As for the evaluation of meaning-focused videoconferencing tasks, Wang (2007) investigated six criteria that proved suitable for the purpose. Broadly, the researcher concluded that the evaluation should be based on language-learning potential, practicality, learner fit, authenticity, and positive impact.

Another theme that emerged among the selected empirical studies was **assessment**. In an attempt to create a contextualized online test of Spanish, Larson and Hendricks (2009) found no significant difference between the use of contextualized items instead of discrete-point terms. Some students, however, reported that they enjoyed completing contextualized items more. In addition, the Versant for Spanish test (Pearson Education, 2011) proved to be effective in determining various levels of students' oral proficiency in Spanish as a FL (Blake et al., 2008). Roever (2005) developed and validated a one-hour web-based test of pragmalinguistics focusing on ESL/EFL learners' knowledge of implicatures and speech acts. Finally, the use of e-portfolio, the electronic collection of students' work throughout the course, was employed as an assessment method in a distance EFL class and elicited students' positive comments about their experience when keeping it (Baturay & Daloğlu, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we aimed at reviewing all relevant empirical studies on LTDE between 2005 and 2010. The analysis of the content of the selected articles showed that studies have primarily focused on course and task design issues, telecollaboration and conferencing, assessment, and language teaching across various formats of DE.  Further research investigating teacher-student interaction in distance language courses and students' engagement is needed.

Most studies focused on foreign language teaching versus second language teaching. Due to the differences in the contexts, we believe it is necessary to conduct additional studies on second LTDE. In terms of languages taught in distance classes, we found that ESL/EFL, Spanish, and German were most frequently researched and that the list of the languages was rather limited. We consider it important, therefore, to explore teaching other languages at a distance. This suggestion echoes the one made by Wang and Vasquez (in press).

Moreover, only one out of the 24 studies was conducted with high-school learners while others focused on undergraduate and graduate students. We consider such lack of studies on language teaching in a K-12 setting as a major gap in the research literature, especially given the development and widespread availability of virtual schools in the United States and abroad. The list of technologies used for online language teaching included various course management systems, such as Blackboard and Moodle, conferencing tools such as NetMeeting and Skype, and other Web 2.0 software. We believe that future research should focus on free applications that teachers may employ when developing and implementing distance language courses. Given the abundance of free applications online, only a surprising few were mentioned as being used in the courses in the selected research studies.

Finally, we found an equal proportion of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches, while fewer studies employ mixed methods. The evident gaps in research literature include such vital topics as teacher-student and student-student feedback, vocabulary teaching, and the teaching of pronunciation, grammar, and reading, all potentially fruitful areas for future research.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## NOTES

1 Open learning may be defined as a type of distance learning with "open entry—open exit courses" and the flexibility of students' schedule in terms of beginning and end of courses depending on students' readiness and preferences (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004, p. 358). Open learning is sometimes referred to as flexible learning (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004).

2 Distributed learning may be defined as a type of distance learning which is characterized by a distribution of the course components across various media, a student-centered approach, and flexibility in terms of time and place of students' study (Rennie, 2007).

3 Networked learning may be defined as a type of instruction that mainly takes place in traditional classrooms but includes web-enhanced aspects such as readings and syllabus. Networked learning is sometimes called learning in connected space (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004).

4 WebCT now owned by Blackboard (http://www.blackboard.com/), Moodle (http://moodle.org/), CLIPS (http://clipsrules.sourceforge.net/), IRC Français chat program (http://www.cc.gatech.edu/elc/irc_francais/generalFAQ.html), Skype (http://www. skype.com), Visu (http://visu-tutorat.org/), Lyceum (http://lyceum-taster.open.ac.uk/), NetMeeting (http://www.microsoft.com/netmeeting), UdeC English Online (http://www.cfrd.cl/english/presentacion.html), POWER (http://formoosa.fl.nthu.edu.tw/power/), CARE (http://candle.fl.nthu.edu.tw/care/), an "online pedagogical assistant" for blended learning (http://www.taskbasedenglish.fr/), Second Life (http://secondlife.com/).

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