

ON MAKING USE OF MOODLE IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO FUTURE ENGINEERS

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Abstract

The paper considers the experience of using the asynchronous mode of teaching English as a foreign language for specific purposes. The asynchronous course delivery is based on distance courses created in Moodle. A description of the courses is presented in the paper and the preferences of students as for methods used are noted. Also, the issues the teachers need to address when preparing and implementing courses for asynchronous e-teaching environment are considered.

Keywords: asynchronous online learning, blended learning, computer mediated communication, feedback

INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological transformations in the world have led to the need to rethink the role of a foreign language in the professional development of a specialist and, accordingly, to create models of teaching a foreign language, taking into account the features of the current stage of development of education, in particular, the implementation of the ideas of blended learning using information and communication technologies (ICT). Technology is already a permanent part of students' everyday life and using it in teaching has proven to have far-reaching effects on language acquisition.

EXPOSITION

When information and communication technologies are successfully integrated into teaching they facilitate and foster students' engagement in and attitude towards the subject. Among the popular ways of using ICT in the educational environment are the electronic textbooks and encyclopedias, the role-playing games and intellectual games using artificial intelligence, conducting educational teleconferences, webinars, use of test programs for control, networking with colleagues, etc. It is no longer necessary to make photocopies of materials for work in the

classroom, since students instantly distribute the necessary information through social networks and platform messengers. Permanent access to the Internet makes it possible to use web-resources directly in the lecture, thereby enlivening and updating the learning process. Computer mediated way of teaching is a powerful factor in motivating the learning and intellectual development of future engineers. On the one hand, it gives them the opportunity to use their specific knowledge and abilities required to carry out tasks related to the foreign language they intend to master, and since e-learning materials can be constantly updated it helps to increase the relevance and novelty of the learning content. On the other hand, ICTs meet the intellectual interests of young people who prefer multitasking on mobile devices: chatting with friends, searching for information, listening to their favorite music or audiobook. ICT is at the basis of the development of the so called "blended learning" - a range of opportunities that combine the Internet and digital media with established forms of learning that require the physical presence of the teacher and students. The blended learning model combines traditional and modern educational technologies in teaching foreign languages, while not at all reducing the importance of classroom learning for the formation of speech

and sociocultural skills. Any method, technique or form of training used must be methodologically justified and consistent with the goals and objectives. In this paper we will mainly focus on the type of learning in which **the student and teacher are not directly communicating in real time**. One of the popular electronic environments for creating distance courses is the Moodle platform (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment). As a free and open online system, Moodle is constantly updated thanks to the collective intelligence of educators and experts. Unlike a single private web blog, Moodle brings together all learning strategies and tools in one space, supporting various databases (PostgreSQL, MySQL, Oracle). Functional and easy to understand and use, the Moodle system allows students to access it at any time and from anywhere, and allows teachers to carry out ongoing testing of acquired knowledge with an assessment in automatic or remote manual modes and adjustment of the individual curriculum of each of the students. Assessment of students' knowledge is based on the completion of various kinds of tasks, such as multiple choice, true-false, completion, gap filling, matching, essay writing, etc.

We have developed the multimedia distance courses "Technical English for Future Engineers" and "Business English for Future Engineers" for students of the Precision and Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering faculties of the Technical University of Gabrovo. The courses are designed for fifteen academic hours of independent work in accordance with the syllabus for the second semester of the Bachelor's degree courses included as compulsory in the corresponding curricula. The courses are based on audio and video materials related to the specifics of engineering work, workplace safety rules (Technical English for Future Engineers), the features of recruitment and hiring strategies, professional development, practical recommendations for compiling correspondence necessary for employment and preparing for an interview with an employer ("Business English for Future Engineers"). These themes are explored in the context of

real-life activities, which contributes to the formation of socio-cultural and professional competence of students and motivation for learning. The courses include four topics containing tasks aimed at developing skills in listening, reading, writing, lexical and grammatical exercises, a glossary, hyperlinks and a final test, as well as reference material. Students worked on the course in two modes: training and self-check. The number of attempts, time and deadlines for completing tasks were clearly set by the teacher, which contributed to the self-organization and self-mobilization of students. Feedback from students at the end of the courses was only positive, namely: 83% of students indicated that the course tasks and assignments were interesting and stimulating and very relevant to the course; 78% have significantly expanded their vocabulary of professional English vocabulary; 89% of students liked the opportunity to independently plan the implementation of tasks within the deadlines determined by the teacher, or to put it in another way, to work on their own pace and level; 70% increased interest in learning English after working on the courses; 90% of students positively assessed the possibility of instant assessment of their comprehension of the taught material. The majority of students (80%) expressed the idea that the use of such courses would diversify and contribute to the effective study of English for special purposes included in the professional training of future engineers at a technical university. With all the positive feedback from undergraduate students and their interest in teaching and learning a foreign language in the form of a distance course along with face to face sessions, it should be noted that teachers need to make **a lot of efforts** at the stage of developing the structure of a lesson, organizing its content and uploading materials to Moodle. Depending on the goals of the course, the teacher must consider the content and feasibility of tasks (taking into account various types of activity), their number, execution mode (training or test), number of attempts, deadlines, etc. Special attention should be paid to tasks with an open answer, for example, writing an essay, compiling dialogues. Such tasks are necessary for the formation of foreign language

competence but, unlike closed ones (multiple choice, finding matches, etc.), Moodle cannot automatically check them, but only fix the time and date of completion. The teacher can check and evaluate such work or use the capabilities of Moodle to organize peer review. These difficulties arise only at the initial stage of work in the Moodle virtual learning environment. Further in the process of work, especially in a friendly atmosphere of cooperation, teachers themselves are interested in this creative activity, anticipating an effective learning outcome and students' gratitude.

CONCLUSION

1. The Learning Management System - Moodle is invaluable for the foreign language teacher when it comes to structuring and sharing learning materials with students. The pages can combine text, images and video, and files and links to websites can be shared with learners easily. The course content can be added to and updated whenever needed.
2. This e-learning platform is of great help as it provides tools for monitoring and assessing progress. There is a variety of question types in a Quiz to assess the learning and give immediate detailed feedback to the learners.
3. Moodle and asynchronous learning provide more flexibility to learners. Students can self-pace and watch videos over again. Being able to study at their own speed makes dealing with

busy schedules easier. The learning resources are available to the learners wherever and whenever they want them.

4. Moodle gives the students percentages and scores on lessons and tests. Also, it is possible to structure the lesson in such a way that will force the student to go back and listen to or read the lesson more carefully.

5. The data collected from the interviews administered to the participants in the distance courses created in Moodle made it evident that the majority of the students preferred the asynchronous online mode of learning to in-class (face-to-face) mode of learning. The reasons behind their choice could be attributed to all of the above mentioned advantages or benefits.

6. However, while students enjoy learning at their own pace, they still need face-to-face or online meetings to discuss a subject or ask questions.

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