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E-course Based on the LMS Moodle for English Language Teaching: Development and Implementation of Results

Irina Rymanova[a]*, Nikolai Baryshnikov[a,b], Anna Grishaeva[c]

[a]National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, 30 Lenin Avenue,Tomsk, 634050, Russia
[b]Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, 9 Kalinin Avenue, Pyatigorsk, 357532, Russia
[c]National Research Tomsk State University, 36 Lenin Avenue, Tomsk, 634050, Russia

Abstract

In this article, blended learning, its effectiveness in foreign language teaching, the basic approaches used in the development of e-learning courses "Foreign Language (English)" for four modules are considered, and the results are presented.

1. Introduction

E-learning has been steadily integrating into the educational process due to global information technologies (IT). In America and European countries wide development and implementation of information and communication technologies started earlier, but only since the 21th century, many Russian high schools were able to apply electronic technologies and create their own electronic resources. At Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU) e-learning has gone through several stages of its formation and development since 2000, starting with the technical support of the educational process and providing learning management system (LMS). According to the e-learning implementation strategy, one of the main goals for TPU is to provide an educational process via electronic courses up to 80 per cent of disciplines, with the active involvement of teachers in the e-course development.

* Corresponding author.
  *E-mail address:*rymanova@tpu.ru (I. Rymanova).

2. Research

2.1. Blended learning

Using state-of-the-art IT in the foreign language teaching process, we do not only form the language skills, but also develop some other skills and abilities that allow forming both sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. In this regard, it is becoming urgent problem to consider the didactic features and functions of state-of-the-art IT, the use of which enhance the educational process.

Blended learning is an innovative form of e-learning based on IT in combination with traditional forms of learning. The development of this form of learning is nearly concerned in the e-learning development in terms of IT as a fundamental principle (Jih & Reeves, 1992).

In our opinion, e-learning is training based on the use of information and telecommunication technologies. The important point is to deliver teaching materials to students via the computer net. In the beginning, e-learning didn't imply full-time learning, but now we do use face-to-face pre- meetings and exams. This kind of learning is often used for distance courses (Hoole, 2012).

E-learning has several advantages:
• opportunity to choose the most interesting subject from the course for a student;
• autonomy and flexibility: students learn to be initiative in terms of time and place of learning;
• personal choice of pace of learning, a variety of tools (video, audio, animation, text, images) and activity forms (games, team work, individual activity);
• involvement in the leaning process by means of various learning platforms;
• wide possibilities in managing and consulting students to prevent possible misfits in learning despite difference in location of a student and a teacher;
• social equality is equal chance to get education in spite of residence, health status and financial statement.

E-learning may have also a number of drawbacks, such as:
• lack of social contact between a teacher and students, between learners themselves (if not provided by course moderation);
• possible gaps, poor understanding of the content of training due to insufficient tutors' monitoring;
• it requires strict self-discipline, high degree of consciousness, i.e. quite well-formed autonomy skills;
• the goal cannot be achieved in training if there is no well-organized counseling;
• educational process based on writing with no opportunity to express their knowledge in oral form can be stumbling block for some students;
• requirements for good technical equipment (computer and Internet access).

Blended learning can enhance students' motivation to learn due to the fact that students are free to choose the modules of the course, meet their needs when there are some gaps in knowledge. In addition, students receive on-line feedback from the teacher who helps to accept all the details of the course. Face-to-face classes let students prove appropriate and efficient state of accepting the teaching materials, get feedback and correct their obtained results (Cheremisina Harrer, et al., 2015).

2.2. Development and description of the course

In 2014 e-learning English courses for the 1st and 2nd year students have been developed to improve the level of foreign language and optimize teaching hours. The developed e-learning courses, based on LMS Moodle, are supposed to use 30% of the teaching time on-line. It is important to note that for each e-course the special requirements of pedagogical design should be taken into account, what helps to determine the level of foreign language, the basic needs of students, and the final outcome of learning and provide the conditions of results.

Accepting of lexical and grammatical materials, as well as the development of speaking skills within each topic was determined as outcomes by the course developers. For the course development the following general information should be prepared:

• personal details of a teacher
• information about a unit

• rating plan with a certain amount of points for each activity
• additional resources linked with the main training material

The essential requirements for the e-course should be also its attraction and visibility, presenting teaching materials in digital media in the forms of tables, charts, and other graphic objects. The most important task for course developers is to determine the conjunction of each activity with learning outcomes, as well as the deadlines for the activities and assessment criteria. On this stage guidelines and instructions for activity presenting, samples of assignments should be prepared, and peer-to-peer review activity is necessary to organize (Kachalov & Tarasova, 2013).

The presentation of theoretical material has also specific requirements:

• It should be visually attractive to encourage students
• a large amount of information should be avoided.

Undoubtedly, for self-study activities should be interactive with clear and specific instructions. The teaching material contains the most popular tools of the LMS Moodle "Book", "Glossary". The most of exercises and activities are presented by "Wiki", "Seminar", "Exercise", "Quiz".

To get complete information about learning outcomes, input, intermediate and final testing were offered to the students in the beginning. It requires a wide variety of interactive tests, such as multiple choice, matching, short answer, etc. to increase students' motivation to work independently on-line.

Moreover, such means of communication as Forum, Chat and Wiki allow an e - course to meet up-to-date requirements. These tools can be referred to active learning methods, organizing training of students in collaboration. Particular attention is given to a variety of multimedia that can be easily integrated into the e-learning course as audio and video resources that are important to improve the listening comprehension skills.

Thus, the structure of the e-course is presented in the following sections:

• section to place general data (metainformation about the course, personal data about teachers, etc.)
• section including information about units, instructions for units, the rating plan, teaching materials for vocabulary and grammar in textual, audio and video formats), a wordlist, interactive activities, instruction for essay writing and presentation), as well as Internet links as additional resources
• Assessment section (includes tests to determine levels of language skills)

The learning process is based on traditional teaching of a discipline and on-line learning, using the e-course developed in LMS Moodle for monitoring the students' self-study (Staker & Horn, 2012). At the beginning students get teacher's on-line instructions in the classroom saving time for the quiz and the results discussed.

3. Results

During the current academic year, 18 English language teachers of the department were involved in this model of on-line teaching. At the end of the academic year a questionnaire was conducted in the following areas (see fig. 1):

• use of e-courses by the teachers
• students' attitude to use the e-courses
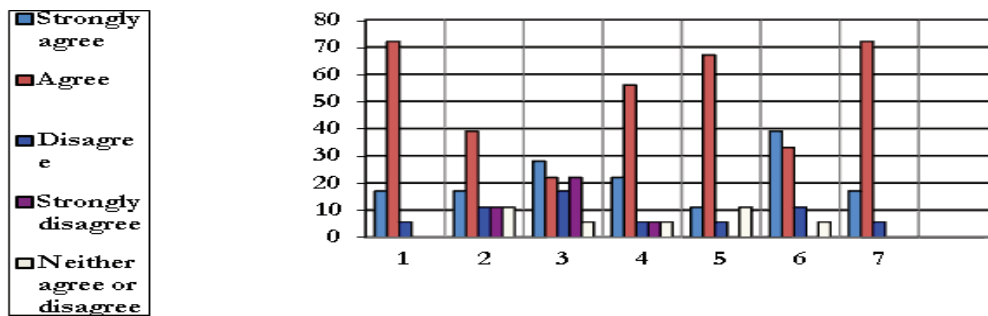• difficulties in the use of e-courses

Fig. 1. Use of e-courses in learning process.

The diagram (Fig. 1) Shows that the majority of teachers (88%) agrees that the use of e-courses is suitable for teaching English and the students are ready to learn English (78%) by means of LMS Moodle, which has positive effects on their academic results (78%). Moreover, 89 per cent of teachers admit that the e-courses effectively engage students in the learning process. However, 56 per cent of teachers consider that they have extra work for teaching, online learning is also an extra burden for the students. Despite this, it is possible to emphasize the positive attitude of the students to the e-courses according to the diagram (see fig. 2).
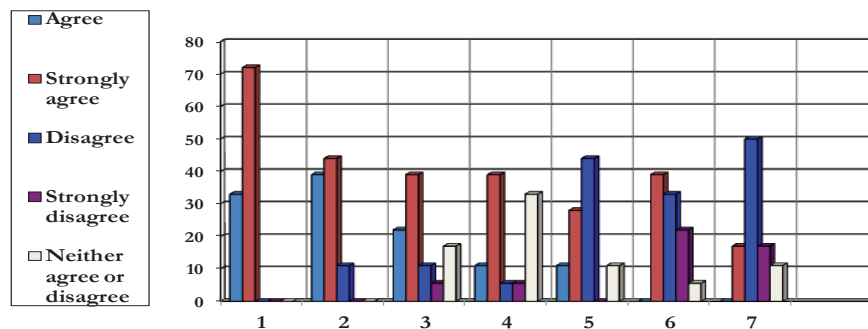

Fig. 2. Students' attitude to e-courses.

According to the teachers, 95 per cent of the students consider the availability of learning materials as a great advantage and 83 percent of the students is able to get extra credits. However, the students are not always ready to fulfill all types of the activities developed in LMS Moodle, especially those that require academic skills to analyze, compare and annotate. More than 60 per cent oppose to do peer review. This is due to the fact that being undergraduate students; they are not prepared enough for self-study and independent activity. However, it should be noted that the students have no difficulty dealing with e-courses: the interface is clear enough; the feedback can present the score to analyze the result. In the e-course students can easily demonstrate their information literacy using the additional resources. However, it is not so about the teachers: 66 per cent of teachers are weak with IT competence, as seen from fig. 3. What is more, 72 per cent of teachers aren't able to get together an e-course and classroom training; half of them have not enough technical background.
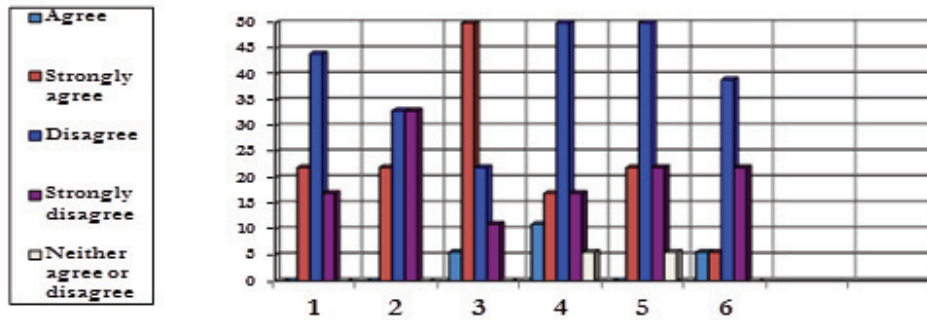
Fig. 3. Teachers' difficulties in e-learning.

However, the teachers understand the possibilities of blended learning, when online learning combines with traditional teaching as a perspective of education. These facts demonstrate the proper priorities in new educational methods, development and implement of e-learning for teaching languages.

4. Conclusion

Blended learning is a form of learning that combines traditional full-time form of teaching with modern forms of e-learning, increasing the advantages and offsetting the disadvantages of each. According to Smith and Kurthen, it utilizes some significant on-line activities in otherwise face to face (F2F) learning, but less than 45 per cent (Tomlinson & Wittaker, 2013). The modular organization of teaching provides the flexibility of the program. Students choose a module by interest, but irrelevant, well known already information they may pass, according to individual learning strategy.

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