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ОТНОШЕНИЯ И ОЖИДАНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ В АСИНХРОННОЙ ОНЛАЙН ДИСКУССИИ

Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет (ТПУ) пытается занять лидирующую позицию в мировом рейтинге лучших университетов, в связи с чем было инициировано введение онлайн курсов в программу университета. Языковые курсы теперь имеют онлайн компонент, размещенный на платформе Moodle, которая является официальной системой управления обучением в ТПУ. Данная работа рассматривает эффективность асинхронной онлайн дискуссии в образовательном процессе. Были проанализированы ожидания студентов от онлайн дискуссии и их отношение к данному виду работы. Результаты исследования указывают, что существуют определенные преимущества, и говорят об общем позитивном восприятии онлайн дискуссий студентами. Но в то же время были обнаружены определенные проблемы и предложены способы их решения.

Ключевые слова: асинхронная онлайн дискуссия, Moodle, онлайн курс.

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TUTOR'S ROLE IN ONLINE COURSES

The increased use of information and communication technologies in education demands a critical review of the approaches used for supporting teaching and learning activities in online environment. The paper discusses the special role of the tutor who guides and supports the learning process in the online course supplementing traditional face-to-face activities in the blended learning model. Students' evaluations of tutor's role were analyzed and underlay this study. The findings show that professional and successful tutoring helps students in improving their learning efficacy and having greater personal responsibility for their outcomes.

Keywords: blended learning, e-learning, online course, tutor.

1. Introduction

Integration of information and communication technologies in the educational process of Russian universities has become a modern trend. Continuous growth of e-learning technologies leads to a real revolution in the learning process in higher educational institutions. At present e-learning technologies are widely used in most Russian universities, they are thought to be a powerful tool for intensification and individualization of learning. When Individual peculiarities of students are taken into consideration, they allow creating optimal conditions for potential capabilities implementation of each student [1].

National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU) makes a particular emphasis on e-learning, aiming to increase university competitiveness on educational market and move up the world university ranking. At present active work on building single e-learning environment based on smart education principles such as the system of competence formation, individual learning trajectories development and personal educational environment creation is being conducted [2]. TPU implements three e-learning models with different correlation of time allocation and workload, organizational principlesof face-to-face and online learning. They are:
- learning with web-support;

- blended learning;
- pure online learning.

Teaching foreign languages has specific character and certain limitations and doesn't allow introducing pure online learning at university. The researchers consider blended learning model to be the best way of teaching and learning foreign languages as it combines face-to-face and online learning. The time allocated to online course can range from 30 % to 80 %; and it is up to a teacher to decide about the workload and content of the online course.

Blended learning in a priority model of e-learning at TPU. This model has great potential and perspectives as it creates new environment full of specific benefits and opportunities in comparison with the traditional teaching approach. With integration of blended learning in the educational process the role and functions of teachers change considerably. They are usually called online tutors and they cease to be the source of information for students, they help to understand the essence of learning process and the mechanisms of getting knowledge.

2. Literature review

Literature review shows that researchers understand the role and functions of online tutors in different ways.

McKeachie identified six teaching roles, all of which can be applied to online teaching:

- A facilitator who enhances student learning by encouraging active participation in discussion and by helping the student to see education as meaningful and relevant.
- An expert who communicates expertise through lectures and discussions, and is able to stimulate students without overwhelming them.
- A formal authority that helps students by establishing boundaries such as acceptable conduct and dates of submission of materials.
- A socializing agent who has contacts within the larger academic community, and as such can be helpful to students in providing such things as letters of recommendation and links to research and publication sources.
- An ego ideal that is charismatic and shows commitment and enthusiasm not only to the subject matter but also to the students themselves.
- A person who demonstrates compassion and understanding of student needs [3].

Keengweand Kang characterize tutor's role in the following way:

- encourage and support student's discussions and participation;
- facilitate discussion or activities;
- manage online and face-to-face activities;
- give feedback;
- mentor and
- evaluator [4].

Online tutors usually create their own courses and strive to make the courses engaging and effective, encouraging interaction, fostering reflection, and self-improvement. Polat and Moiseeva, Russian researches, prove that an online course should contain the following didactic functional blocks:

- organizational and methodical;
- informative and training;
- identifying and controlling [5].

The first block includes information about goals and objectives of the course and explains how it links to other courses of the program. It also provides a brief description of the course and recommendations of use. The informative and training block should consist of modules of theoretical material and practical tasks. The controlling functions can be implemented in different ways: tests, webinars, online discussions, etc.

We agree that the implementation of blended learning approach is impossible without complex monitoring and analysis. The studies show that no matter how independent a person can be, there are the situations when an individual needs some support from a certain specialist: support in decision making, support in professional development, etc. One of the key moments of successful blended learning integration is the presence of a person who supports individual performance of students in e-learning environment – the tutor.

3. Supporting learners through the course

In order not to feel isolated and have excessive freedom online students should have support provided by the tutor. Now we will try to consider the role and work conditions of the tutor, supporting students in blended learning. Four different functions of tutoring in virtual space can be established:

- pedagogical – attempts to sustain the content learning process;
- social – attempts to support inter-personal and social relationships by considering personal needs, requests, feelings and other expressions;
- managerial – attempts to keep a certain course / learning activity in line within the general aims;
- technical – interventions related to different technical problems [6].

Tutors in a blended learning course perform a variety of tasks:

1. The tutor together with the students builds their individual learning paths both at face-to-face classes and in e-learning environment, organizes different activities using ICT including the Internet, coordinates class and electronic activities.

2. The tutor provides detailed instructions and introductory tutorials explaining the principles of work in LMS. This will help eliminate technical problems and overcome obstacles so that they achieve their learning objectives [7].

3. The tutor carries out continuously learning process monitoring and complex analysis of intermediate results of each student's activity. This usually involves time used on tasks on the web, quality of executed tests, number of attempts for fulfilling different tasks, address to additional educational resources with the learning platform, data about individual tutorials and data about work activity on forums.

4. The tutor selects electronic educational content, conformable to lesson objectives and creates own multimedia products including audio records and video lectures. This is important not only because it can become an additional element drawing together the tutor and the student but because ICTs simplify and simultaneously intensify learning activity. Online educational resources can be downloaded to mobile devices, can be sent and shared with group mates, can be discussed on forums, etc.

5. The tutor provides face-to-face and distant individual support including emotional and encouraging one. It is important to create the «situation of presence» even in e-learning work mode. The comfort of this situation consists in students' confidence that they will always get timely help and that they are not alone in the virtual environment. The most effective way of tutor-mediated support in the form of distant interaction is to provide a feedback by commenting on students' progress, learning speed, success of tasks completion. The realization of this requirement is feasible owing to functional and services of learning platforms: forums, personal messages, videoconferences and webinars.

In order to help students fulfill their potential tutors should build a friendly e-learning environment. Working in this environment students feel that tutors guide rather than manage them, they share knowledge and experience, inspire to further personal and professional development. Students need to forget about being under control; this will push their boundaries beyond their ordinary learning experiences. Tutors should understand when students need their support and when they want to enjoy the process of self-discovery [8].

Researchers from Victoria University of Wellington gave very vital recommendations for tutors supporting a blended learning course. In order to attain a success tutors should:

- build strong and trusting relationships with participants by getting to know them well, offering them support and demonstrating empathy;
- help make connections between participants by encouraging them to share both personal and professional perspectives in both face-to-face and online interactions;
- provide a mirror to encourage participants' reflection. This involves helping them see what is happening in their own contexts;
- provide a map to show participants possible directions for their personal journeys [9].

4. Methods and data analysis

In order to understand how the students see the role of a tutor in online courses a survey was conducted. 30 undergraduate students of Institute of Cybernetics took part in it during the spring term of 2014–2015 academic year. The course chosen for study is called «General English Blended Course» intended for first-year students. This is a course of English language at pre-intermediate and intermediate undergraduate level; it runs from September to June and equates 30 % of one year's full time study. The questionnaire contained 6 questions trying to evaluate tutor's role and performance in the online course «General English Blended Course».

5 Results

Students' responses informed that they mostly prefer moderate supervision from course tutors (86,7 %), some students wanted self-directed learning with minimum tutor assistance (10 %) and one student wished guided online learning with maximum tutor support (3,3 %). According to their answers we see that students want to take the initiative for their learning and to be more independent. Thus tutors should provide a climate where students can take responsibility for their learning, where they can develop the knowledge, confidence and skills required to become more independent learners.

93,4 % of students told that they don't usually need additional help from tutors in understanding the instructions to the tasks. This high percentage indicates clear guidelines about what to do in each activity.

According to students' opinions immediate feedback was important only in quiz tests when the students wanted to see and analyze their mistakes. Tutor's comments in the test and links to corresponding rules could be very helpful. As for assignment evaluation, technical support and other types of tutor's feedback delayed support was quite a normal option.

Students don't usually expect any personal attitude in tutor's comments on assignments; they wanted just grading and error correction. Constructive and prompt feedback was more important than criticism and praise.

Nearly half of students (43,3 %) believe that tutors should take part in online discussions to encourage students and engage in the dialogue with each other. But the other greater part of students (47,7 %) didn't want active interference of the tutor in their communication. They agreed only on minimum participation of the tutors who could just give positive feedback or make them feel that their contribution was valuable but they were against of their directing the thread of the discussion.

The findings highlight the necessity of tutoring online courses in order to create safe and comfortable learning environment. The learning process should be focused on the student who is supported in his or her study. Profes-

sional tutor support should favour the development of responsible attitude to study, motivation and time management.

6. Conclusion

Implementation of blended learning approach influences all the components of the learning process, the forms and organization methods, activation, intensification and efficacy of the learning process. New tendencies in higher education system lead to reconsidering teacher's role and position; they assume special features in the conditions of blended learning. Blended learning demands transformation of a traditional teacher into a tutor, who becomes more a coordinator or mentor but not a direct source of knowledge and information. The tutor of the blended course stimulates student's ability to self-knowledge and self-perfection.

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РОЛЬ ТЬЮТОРА В ОНЛАЙН КУРСАХ

Рост использования информационно-коммуникационных технологий в образовании требует критического анализа и пересмотра подходов, используемых для поддержки образовательной деятельности в онлайн среде. Данная работа рассматривает особую роль тьютора, который поддерживает и сопровождает учебный процесс в онлайн курсе, дополняющем традиционное контактное обучение в смешанной модели обучения. В основе данного исследования лежит анализ студенческого восприятия роли тьютора. Результаты исследования показывают, что профессиональная и успешная деятельность тьютора помогает повысить эффективность обучения и способствует пониманию личной ответственности студентов за результаты обучения.

Ключевые слова: смешанное обучение, электронное обучение, онлайн курс, тьютор.

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USING WIKIS FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' ONLINE COLLABORATION

Web 2.0 technologies offer new opportunities for their integration into the instructional settings. Such element of Web 2.0 as a wikiis seen as communication and collaboration tool that is often used in online courses to engage students in learning foreign languages. The paper suggests strategies for implementing wikis in order to enhance students' collaboration in online courses. The analyzed wiki activities show that the participants of the online course are ready for effective online collaboration and quite aware of their roles.