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Blended Learning in Teaching ESP to Economics Students

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Abstract. In Ukraine teaching ESP to students is considered to be the priority in higher education. The ability to communicate in other languages plays a vital role in professional competence of specialists in economics. With changing requirements to specialist training there is a need to change approaches to teaching ESP to economics students. The article describes the key features of blended learning approach in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to economics students. A number of tools and technologies that can be used in constructing effective blended learning is given. Moodle-based blended learning approach of teaching ESP is analysed. The potential of the combination of Moodle platform with traditional class-learning methods that can improve the effectiveness of teaching ESP is shown.
Keywords: blended learning, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), technology, Moodle platform, teaching.

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Мішане навчання професійно орієнтованої англійської мови студентів економічних спеціальностей

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Анотація. Розкрито особливості мішаного навчання у процесі професійно орієнтованого навчання англійської мови студентів економічних спеціальностей. Розглянуто засоби і технології, які можуть бути використані у процесі мішаного навчання. Проаналізовано особливості використання технології мішаного навчання професійно орієнтованої англійської мови на базі платформи Moodle. Розглянуто перспективи використання платформи Moodle у поєднанні з традиційним навчанням для підвищення ефективності професійно орієнтованого навчання англійської мови.

Ключові слова: мішане навчання, професійно орієнтоване навчання англійської мови, технологія, платформа Moodle, навчання.

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Смешанное обучение профессионально ориентированному английскому языку студентов экономических специальностей

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Аннотация. Раскрываются особенности смешанного обучения в процессе профессионально ориентированного обучения английскому языку студентов экономических специальностей. Рассматриваются средства и технологии, которые могут быть использованы в процессе смешанного обучения. Анализируются особенности использования технологии смешанного обучения профессионально ориентированному английскому языку на базе платформы Moodle. Рассматриваются перспективы использования платформы Moodle в сочетании с традиционным обучением для повышения эффективности обучения профессионально ориентированному английскому языку.

Ключевые слова: смешанное обучение, профессионально ориентированное обучение английскому языку, технология, платформа Moodle, обучение.

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Introduction. In Ukraine teaching ESP to students is considered to be the priority in higher education. The ability to communicate in other languages plays a vital role in professional competence of specialists in economics. With changing requirements to specialist training there is a need to change approaches to teaching ESP to economics students. In the condition of limited class hours new technologies should be based on individualization or autonomy that will serve the purpose of lifelong learning. People become specialists in the process of their personal professional development. So, in this way, autonomy can be considered as a necessary condition, in which students can use their potential of a human brain and modern technologies, including information ones, to get knowledge faster, with higher efficiency and less effort. So, constant refreshment and improvement the content and methods of teaching are needed to prepare the professionals who will be capable to take responsibilities in decision making, to apply critical thinking and creative approaches to their work. Apart these skills, very important competence of specialists is the ability to use at least one foreign language as a tool for professional communication in the national and international labour markets.

In spite of understanding the language importance, there are problems with language competence that is expressed in low ability of young specialists to be involved into international projects and research. This problem can be explained by some inconsistencies of existing language education system. It is the lack of continuity in language teaching at schools and universities as well as the low mobility of Ukrainian people in comparison with Europe; and the decreasing number of learning hours for language tuition. To minimize these problems the language education system needs to be intensified by means of strengthening self-learning of students that should be organized and methodically supported by teachers and special teaching tools. Therefore, the combination of online interactive teaching with traditional class-learning methods can improve the effectiveness of teaching ESP. This process is called blended learning.

The research problem. With the above assumptions in mind, the present study sees the challenge of effective and optimal integration blended learning into the English for Specific Purposes teaching process to economics students as a research problem.

The research aims. As a result, the present study firstly aims at analyzing the term "blended learning" as well as tools and technologies that can be used for effective blended learning in teaching English for Specific Purposes to economics students. It also aims to consider Moodle-based

blended learning approach in teaching ESP and the potential of the use of Moodle platform in the combination of online interactive teaching with traditional class-learning methods that can improve the effectiveness of teaching ESP.

Blended Learning. Attempts to define blended learning concentrate on the combination of familiar methods of learning (lectures or seminars) with the more mediated ones made possible by new technologies. It is difficult to find a widely accepted definition of blended learning, and even more difficult to find a core set of literature on blended learning methodologies. Such training approaches run from traditional, face-to-face class meetings to totally online courses that have no direct interpersonal contact. For example, Hanson, K. S., and Clem, F. A. consider blended learning to be generally acknowledged as falling somewhere between these two extremes, incorporating elements of each [4]. The term blended learning reflects the different approaches to learning, namely the use of the advantages of eLearning in combination with face-to-face learning, the combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning within online courses as well as the use of different technological solutions (computer, mobile phone, satellite TV, video conferencing, etc.) to implement training activities. Pedagogical approaches to using information technology in the learning process are very diverse: from the modernization of traditional methods to create new methods [6]. Graham, C. R. states that blended learning is the combination of instruction from two historically separate models of teaching and learning: traditional face-to-face learning systems and distributed learning systems [3]. Osguthorpe, R. and Graham, C. R. mention that those who use blended approaches base their pedagogy on the assumption that there are inherent benefits in face-to-face interaction (both among learners and instructor) as well as the understanding that there are some inherent advantages to using online methods in their teaching. Thus the aim of those using blended learning approaches is to find a harmonious balance between online access to knowledge and face-to-face human interaction [8]. According to A. Heinze and C. Procter, blended learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and is based on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course [5]. M. Oliver and K. Trigwell believe that blended learning is based on a mixture of two or more components, such as various means of information delivery, different pedagogical approaches, combining theoretical with practical work within one course [7].

The idea of blended learning can be summarised in this figure [8]:

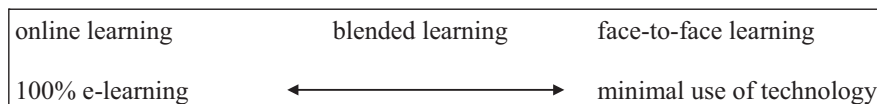


Figure. Blended Learning

Thus, blended learning can be defined as integrating technology into classroom learning and teaching. Today it can refer to any combination of different methods of learning, different learning environments, different learning styles. In short, the effective implementation of this

approach is essentially all about making the most of the learning opportunities and tools available to achieve optimal learning environment.

Blended learning in teaching ESP is student-centered. In student-centered teaching the teacher focuses on



planning, teaching and assessment around the needs and abilities of students. The main idea behind the practice is that learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to the students' lives, needs, and interests and when they are actively engaged. In blended learning process students are involved in the learning process; they don't depend on their teacher all the time; they can communicate with each other in pairs and small groups; they value each other's contributions, cooperate, learn from each other and help each other. And in this process the teacher helps to guide students, manages their activities, directs their learning and helps them develop language skills. The method allows students to decide when and where they want to study. This flexibility can cause some difficulties to those who have poor time-management skills and who are not used to working autonomously. It is the teacher's role to help students develop the skills they require to work independently, particularly if this is the first time they have learned a language in a blended learning environment.

A number of tools and technologies can be used in for effective blended learning ESP:

- technologies that are commonly used in face-to-face learning situations, such as PowerPoint, interactive whiteboards and audience response systems;
- virtual communication tools that enable users to engage in discussions and activities over the internet, including audio files, discussion boards, forums, chats or videoconferencing, email;
- social-networking software, now extensively used by students and staff in learning and teaching, such as instant messaging and phone calls, podcasts, social-networking sites, weblogs and wikis;
- e-learning systems, that is, online environments that bring together a range of tools to support e-learning;
- mobile learning using mobile phones, laptops and tablet PCs etc [1; 2].

Moodle-based Blended Learning. Moodle platform is one of the most effective course management systems designed to help teachers create online courses with a number of different modules (lessons, quizzes and resources) and possibilities of application in the learning context (types of tasks and exercises) and incorporation of new modules, thus guaranteeing the functionality of its use and providing the possibility of adding or suppressing information when necessary. If used appropriately, it can provide the students enhance their cooperative learning and independence. To make a profitable use of this platform the teacher's formation and interest is extremely important in order to conduct this challenge with success [10].

Moodle platform provides users with a series of tools and basic support for its correct implementation. It allows the integration of a wide range of resources, a variety of questions, glossaries, tests, collections of problems and exercises, lecture notes; including any kind of text-based or Html-formatted documents, multimedia resources such as graphics, video or audio (e.g., MP3 files), PowerPoint, or Flash-based applications. It can provide opportunities for genuine interaction online. One of the simplest communication tools is a forum, or chat. The teacher's role is to monitor this interaction and decide how best to ma-

nage it. The platform focuses on giving educators the best tools to manage and promote learning and allows teachers to organize, manage and deliver course materials. From a didactic point of view, the usage of multimedia tools to create attractive activities makes the learning process is friendlier for students. As a consequence, these activities increase the interest of the students in their studies [9]. Teachers can provide students with a large amount of resources that they cannot usually show in the classroom due to time constraints.

The process of Moodle-based blended learning ESP to economics students can be divided into two parts: face-to-face learning and Moodle-based distance learning. Firstly, it is necessary to decide what kinds of activities it is reasonable to use in distance learning based on Moodle platform. It can be theoretical grammar material, video and audio lessons conducted by native speakers, individual tasks, project activities, tests, online forums and chats, supplementary reading of authentic books. Then it is necessary to decide what kinds of activities it is necessary to use in the face-to-face form. Blended learning is not new and unknown to students in Ukraine, but sometimes it is necessary to organize overview lectures, where an instructor explains all the details of blended learning. Overview lectures can be used to identify language level, investigate interests and needs of each student that will enable to adapt syllabus to new requirements. It is worth conducting practical face-to-face classes for students, who just begin to study English for Specific Purposes, because, for example, teaching explanation of new terms and concepts is very important, time-consuming and control-demanding work. Face-to face instruction can also be used for intermediate and final control (examinations), work results presentation and individual consultations to help students to cope with emerged difficulties.

The blended learning environment based on the Moodle platform promotes students' interest, facilitates active participation in numerous activities (vocabulary and grammar exercises, online quizzes, forums, listening and watching tasks) and improves students' self-instruction skills. It also provides language teachers with numerous advantages, such as availability of numerous online resources; provision of a simple, clear view of all learning activities and resources for every module; uploading new articles and newly developed activities during the course flexibility in task assessment and grading tracking student activity to see how much time students allocate to different tasks and activities online easier control over teaching and learning pace to know their students' stronger and weaker points, both online and in the classroom.

Conclusions. Blended learning approach of teaching English for Specific Purposes to economics students has great potential due to the following reasons: it allows to use up-to-date language material, chosen in accordance with student's interests, needs and abilities; students learn to work with information flow in English; creation of distance learning courses, designed for students of different language levels, allows every student to learn language on appropriate level and each learner can compare his/her knowledge in the beginning and in the end of semester; it gives an opportunity to vary tasks and make them really creative and



research; teacher has an opportunity to use face-to-face lessons and individual consultations to find out the reasons for difficulties of each student or to give the students an opportunity to present their research work results.

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