

The Organisation of e-Learning Teaching and Training of EFL Teachers in the Use of Innovative Methods

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Abstract: The study analyses the experience of conducting the training course for EFL teachers in the use of e-Learning technologies and innovative methods of ESL teaching. It is designed to give a better understanding of different opportunities of e-Learning technologies in EFL teaching as well as to analyze the course results. The study is also aimed at providing data on the implementation of ICT in a classroom environment. Methods and techniques of conducting the course are provided. Much attention is given to different ways to use various IT and Web 2.0 tools, interactive whiteboards, on-line Skype courses and LMS Moodle learning environments in ESL classes. Attempts are made to analyze the impact of the course in increasing professional opportunities for EFL teachers, giving new perspectives in teaching using innovative techniques to improve the quality of the English language acquisition. Conclusions are drawn on the dissemination of views and research results which encourages discussion while contributing to both academic and professional development.

Key words: EFL training, e-Learning, innovative methods, LMS Moodle, dissemination

INTRODUCTION

The digital society of the 21st century introduces new technologies every day and it is important to understand that using technology in education, especially in learning languages and cultures is not a choice anymore but a necessity. In a world full of sights and sounds it would be inappropriate to try and teach foreign languages through the printed word alone.

Encouraging the use of e-Learning and innovative technologies and promoting interest in further research in this field of language learning methodology is one of the main goals of the inservice and future teacher training organized by the department of foreign languages, Mari State University. According to the research results, the rapid pace of new developments in the modern society makes.

EFL teachers feel intimidated and confused with new terms such as Wiki, Blog, Podcast. It is evident that there has been developed a significant number of courses on digital education and usage of ICT in classroom environment (the Mari State University is not an exception) still there is a certain lack of combined courses aimed at providing both digital literacy and EFL teaching methods. The training is aimed at showing and teaching

inservice and future teachers how to adjust and utilize up-to-date active, interactive and e-Learning technologies effectively as they go along.

Another aspect of the problem of sufficient implementation ICT in education of is the use of effective and innovative teaching methods and techniques. The course is designed to teach innovative methods in an innovative frame, i.e. by means of effective techniques of innovative character. Thus, the target groups of the course which include undergraduate and graduate students, university professors and practicing teachers have the opportunity to obtain skills and knowledge of e-learning methods which will promote their further professional career and research.

The research is also an integral part of the course. it provides future and practicing EFL teachers as well as young researchers and practitioners with the analyzed and compiled information on EU experience on e-Learning technology-enhanced activities and innovative active and interactive learning methods which are still continuing to grow in number and expanding new subject areas such as ICT skills and teaching EFL.

The training is also intended to promote critical and creative thinking about e-Learning both as a process of learning English as a foreign language and as a topic of

further research and exploration. The content of the course gives EFL teachers topics (problems) for independent research connected with the origin and development of e-Learning technologies in the world and in their home country, special features of different technologies, ways of their usage in the EFL classroom which leads to creating their own virtual resources for EFL teaching. Moreover, the course encourages young teachers to try out new ideas in a supportive environment and create their own plans for EFL virtual and face-to-face classes and gain fresh perspectives on their own experiences of teaching and learning foreign languages.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to get the best results, the course is divided into three parts (modules):

- The use of EU innovative methods and techniques in EFL classroom
- e-Course development and teaching with Moodle
- Use of EU e-Learning technologies and web 2.0 tools in EFL classroom

The multidisciplinary approach is the leading in providing the course as it combines the material from pedagogy, methodology, EU studies and foreign languages. Thus, at the end of the course listeners should be able to have a good command of these spheres.

The pedagogical methods used in the course will be the following: training with active and interactive learning; research projects, either collective or individual; role-play by staging hypothetical situations in classroom; case-study in e-Learning methods; distant learning, ICT.

The activities set out in the modules (courses, workshops, presentations) are well structured; they specify the target groups as well as the specific objectives and the expected results. At the same time, it is necessary to mention the qualitative indicators (periodical assessment of the knowledge acquired by the attendants; the quality of the students' deliveries; the quality and originality of the projects and research carried out by the students and practicing teachers throughout the semester; the quality of the publications.

The final conference as the display of the results throughout the course delivery is supposed to be organized as several debate workshops focused on different yet connected topics. Specialists as well as media will be invited to the conference.

The manner of organizing the training course allows an efficient cooperation of the parties involved in order to get optimal results. The lectures, seminars and workshops

are attended by students and specialists from other higher educational institutions of our city. So, they are able to know the modern tendencies in teaching EFL in information space with the special attention to the EU approach to it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main principles of the course organization:

Organizing the inservice training for EFL teachers one should take into account several factors which influence the design and organization of the course. First, the target group of the course that is practicing and future teachers are adult learners. Thus, education process should be based on the principles of adult education. Second, the majority of the trainees are experienced teachers themselves with their viewpoint of discussed problems. This factor should influence the use of teaching tools, methods and techniques chosen for the training. Third, the trainees are teachers of English as a foreign language; therefore the principles of EFL teaching should be taken into consideration as well.

It is interesting to note that these three groups of factors are connected and correlated to each other. For example, such features of adult education as self-direction in learning and accumulation of personal experience as a resource for learning are connected with the fact that participants of the programme may have their views of the content of the course and understanding of their goals and perspectives of the studies. It leads to the idea of equality of both parts in the course (the adult learners and the teacher), cooperation between them. Cooperation in its turn is related to the EFL principle of activity which demands active participation of students in the learning process. This principle is closely connected with the one of individual approach which is equally important for both adult and EFL teaching and leads to the use of such teaching tools, methods and forms which would consider participants' psychological characteristics such as individual learning style.

There should be mentioned some other and pedagogical principles such as the principle of reflectivity which is based on student's conscientious attitude towards learning process and is a part of his self-motivation; the principle of teaching consistency which implies the correspondence of teaching goals and content to the forms, methods and evaluation tools the principle of updating of results of training, i.e., their immediate implementation. Adherence to these principles promotes a selection of appropriate teaching forms, methods and techniques which the study describes further.

The peculiarities of training organization: By its purposes and contents training fully fits into the andragogical learning model the main principles of which are described in part 3.1. First, a training participant is an equal subject of the teaching process and takes part in creation and development of training, ranging from a goal-setting to a problem setting for the following training session. Secondly, training is organized with the account for individual psychological, age, professional features as well as experience of each member of the training group. Thirdly, training is aimed at the result achievement, at gaining certain skills which are trained and mastered during the session so each trainee has an opportunity to use the trained abilities in practice. Fourthly, training is always a dialogue, both between participants of a group, and between a trainer (mentor) and a group. Besides, training is supposed to be a joint activity of the mentor and the group where each student takes an active part throughout the session which in its turn is an interactive component of the training.

Interactivity is the most important component of successful training. Interactivity consists of the trainees' activity and their interaction with other people in the group. Training as it is belongs to the interactive teaching techniques which promote the development of critical thinking, communicative skills and abilities to work in a team to find appropriate solutions of the problems. However, to make a successful training one should use other interactive tools and methods aimed at goals achievement.

Interactive teaching is being implemented under constant change of activity types: playing, discussion, working in small groups (Biryukova *et al.*, 2015). Forms and methods of interactive teaching can be divided into) discussion-oriented: dialogue, group discussion, real life situation analysis, moral choice situation analysis, etc.) game-based: didactic and creative games as well as business and role plays. Practice shows that discussion-oriented forms are among the most demanded by the trainees.

Speaking about the training organization, one should not forget about a technical aspect of a question, i.e., about equipment of the training. There are certain parameters which are necessary to organize and conduct training successfully. Among them are a well-lit room, no <30 m² with a projector or an interactive board. Tables have to be brought together by two: for small group work (in three or four). Flip charts and markers are also necessary. Other stationery (scissors, study clips, color stickers) should also be in use. Hourglasses as well as musical signals can serve as the way of defining the moment of readiness. For a musical background and creation of a necessary atmosphere a CD-player is used.

A fully-equipped training room is an important but not the most significant component of the effective training organization, the more essential factors in organizing and conducting training is the trainer's awareness and positive attitude of the group, their mutual winning mindset.

e-Learning in EFL teaching: The analysis of the development of university education in the world shows that under the influence of modern computer and telecommunication technologies as well as in the process of development in the field of education market relations formed a new university model. e-Learning integrates existing teaching methods and gives them a new level. The basic idea of modern methods of e-Learning systems is to create educational information environment including computer-based information sources, digital libraries, video and audio library, books and tutorials (Blinova *et al.*, 2014).

Nowadays, the traditional ways of EFL learning are being blended with or replaced by e-Learning or online learning, since it is found helpful in teaching language learners. e-Learning changes the traditional definition of education as it can be extended beyond the classroom at anytime. As for the definition of "e-Learning" it should be mentioned that it is the buzzword in every educational environment which is used to describe the use of "technologies to support learning, teaching and assessment" (Vrazalic *et al.*, 2009).

e-Learning has changed the classroom environment which become completely different from the traditional classroom if a teacher starts using e-Learning technologies like Internet, YouTube, Skype, tweeter, blogs, mobile phones, interactive boards and other. These tools make EFL learning more interesting, motivating, stimulating and meaningful to the students.

According to the research results, the rapid pace of new developments in the modern society makes EFL teachers feel intimidated and confused with new terms such as Wiki, Blog, Podcast and don't use them in their classrooms, though they realize the meaning and the importance of the use of e-Learning in EFL teaching. The solution to this problem is an introduction of educational programs for training EFL teachers as it provides the access to information and knowledge on training methodologies and tools it facilitates the usage of EFL learning principles in practical activities both in real and virtual learning environment (Ivanova, 2012). Although, one can say that there has been developed a significant number of courses on digital education and implementation of ICT in classroom environment there is a certain lack of combined courses aimed at providing both digital literacy and EFL teaching methods. Using and

what's more knowing how to use e-Learning technologies EFL teacher engages students in the process of learning by using English songs, movie clippings, dramatics, advertisements, sports commentaries and many more adding stimulus and interactivity within the classroom.

EFL teachers should be aware of how to adjust and utilize up-to-date e-Learning technologies effectively as they go along because e-Learning technologies are still continuing to grow in number and expanding new subject areas. The EFL teacher will succeed in using e-Learning technologies if he knows special features of different technologies, ways of their usage in the EFL classroom, ways of creating his own virtual resources for EFL teaching. Today the most common Internet technologies popular among EFL teachers are Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, Concordances, educational internet resources, internet reference resources, etc. (Sysoyev and Evstigneev, 2014).

Electronic educational portals nowadays are used almost by every university. Based on different surveys we evaluated the usage of various communication tools, focusing on the use of LMS Moodle which is most widely used in the area of e-Learning in higher education.

The main aim of the course is Moodle course design and its implementation in teaching and learning process in order to enhance the quality of EFL teachers' training, the use of learning space to deliver a blended learning approach for teaching courses. The word «Moodle» is an abbreviation for «modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment», it represents Learning Management System (LMS), based on computer and Internet technologies for guiding educational process.

Educational possibilities of this platform are quite enormous its pedagogical tools allow not just to pass knowledge but also to monitor the results of education with the help of tests and specially prepared tasks. Having created his personal course the teacher organizes students' independent work offering information with the help of files, archives, web pages and web-lections. Built-in Web 2.0 components facilitate in organizing joint educational and research work with the help of file storage, portfolios, workshops, chats, forums. Besides, Moodle system allows to work out and to put forward complex research tasks which require further demonstration of students' knowledge and skills in the audit area.

According to its functionality, Moodle can stand the comparison with well-known commercial learning management systems, at the same time having the advantage they are devoid of, i.e., being distributed with open source code (Ostroukh *et al.*, 2014).

Teachers can realize the control of students' competences formation via special rating system by

collecting and analyzing the information about completed work. We obtain data from graphs, charts and diagrams constructed by the system itself.

With a didactic point of view LMS Moodle is a free learning management system which aims to organize cooperation between teachers and students. It can be effectively used both in the remote and full-time study. The program allows to create interactive communication environment and an effective system of knowledge control (tasks, polls, quizzes, lectures, seminars); to organize differentiated group work; to monitor all students' activities; to inform them about coming events. Thus, the software Moodle is:

- Interoperable, providing an opportunity for using different computer technologies
- Durable, allowing reuse and interchange of the course components
- Adaptive, making possible to include new information technologies without having to reconfigure the entire system
- Complex, allowing to organize the learning process and at the same time to carry out constant control over it
- Open, giving an opportunity to work with the system both locally in the classroom as well as remotely from home

As a progressive and constantly evolving system, Moodle offers the flexibility of the learning process as well as availability and variation of all necessary controls. Courses are design in the form of modules that allows to organize both final and intermediate control throughout the course. Built-in test system in Moodle provides a great opportunity for creating on-line tests. We use two approaches in this area: direct addition to the course of the test itself, followed by the addition of test items and the creation of new tests based on the bank's issues. The second approach demands more time, but at the same time offers teachers additional opportunities. In this case, all questions are constructed in the course categories and subcategories which facilitates searching the database (Zaburdaeva *et al.*, 2015).

This course is for future and practicing EFL teachers who wish to make use of Moodle within their lesson plans and schemes of work. It is also suitable for aspiring and newly qualified teachers who are looking to extend their repertoire of skills at the chalk face.

The main syllabus of the course: Moodle as a platform for virtual learning environment:

- Moodle basics
- Creating and managing content
- Managing your class
- Forums, chats and messaging
- Lessons and blogs
- Quizzes
- Assignments
- Glossaries
- Wikis
- Tests
- Grades and scales
- Surveys and choices
- Moodle administration

As a result, teachers will be able to add the constructive use of ICT to their teaching. They will also have the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues to develop new and exciting resources to support student success in assessment through the application of technology. Moodle supports a wide range of activities including:

- Sharing documents and web-based resources
- Discussion forum for disseminating news and facilitating discussion
- Online submission of assignments for originality checking and online marking
- e-Assessment-multiple choice questions, short answer questions and essay questions
- Wikis for collaborative and creative work
- Polling tools for capturing student opinions, feedback and learning
- Lecture capture viewing for ease of access, revision and review
- Providing direct access to past exam papers-via the Library Repositories

Benefits:

- Moodle is connected to many RHUL services, including banner, campus connect, turnitin, grade mark, and replay (lecture capture) and has proven year-upon-year to be an effective single-point of contact for online learning, assessment and feedback
- Connectivity with banner means that courses have an instant 'community of practice' where communication opportunities both synchronous and asynchronous between students and between staff and students are extended
- Student feedback regarding Moodle indicates an appreciation of a consolidated space for each taught course
- Moodle has a toolbox with both breadth and depth and facilitates many teaching and learning activities

- Moodle offers powerful assessment tools, yet is relatively straightforward to use
- Moodle offers responsive design and works well in tablets and smartphones as well as desktops and laptops

Excellence in education's online teacher support platform aims to complement that by using 'Moodle' to provide a free, Virtual Learning Environment. This Moodle area also provides a space for international partners to collaborate with regards to project deliverables. Within this area, a Moodle forum is provided to aid communication between individuals within the partnership.

From our perspective, another effective means to increase the quality of English language acquisition and stimulate youth values development is participation in the Joint Mari-American online courses "Women Worldwide" and "Bridges to International Education: Global Conversations". The course participants (2012 and 2014) were 4-5th year students of the English Department of the Institute of Education and French-English Department of the Faculty of Foreign Languages (Mari State University, Mari El Republic, Russia) and American students of the University of Missouri as well as teachers, social workers and doctoral students (St. Louis, USA). They had weekly meetings via Skype and e-mail in English. The organizers of the course were one of the authors of this article Dr. T. Golikova and professor J. Cochran, St. Louis (University of Missouri, St. Louis).

The students participated in the online courses which had weekly assignments to read study and books recommended by the teachers and to find additional information on the given issues. After reading the study, students became concerned about issues and were encouraged to learn more about the topics. The supplemental assignments required participants to summarize their conversations and to reflect upon their interchange. Mari students also discussed the issues during their classes of English oral practice, so that the teacher could ensure that they comprehend the information and to give them an opportunity to practice their unprepared (spontaneous) speech in English, finishing each discussion of the issue with a power-point presentation.

In 2012, American and Mari students in the frame work of the course were more concerned with the issues critical to women's interests worldwide such as feminism, social welfare, education, employment, professional work. They learned about women's international organizations and developed their communicative skills, establishing cross-cultural communication.

In 2014, the course objectives were focused more on the issues of education, citizenship and moral education

of the youth (formation of civic qualities, civic identity and character education) in Russia and America. The issues under discussion were as follows: cultural diversity, shared values, stereotypes of their opinion about American and Russian people their attitude towards their own countries; formation of internationalism as respect for culture and statehood of other peoples; values education for Russian and American school and university students, social welfare in both countries and their comparative characteristics; attitude towards the death penalty; international adoption; international organizations and their role worldwide.

In their anonymous surveys Mari students wrote about the wonderful opportunity to communicate and to practice the English language in an unusual way that is online. This online communication supported their English language acquisition. Mari students used the opportunity to communicate with American English native speakers, associated with different dialects of the central East (the central part of the USA). Communicating personally with American students online via Skype, e-mail and Facebook they enlarged their vocabularies, advanced in writing and spontaneous English speech, developed listening skills and discussed social issues while taking gender into consideration. They learned more about American education and social issues from American citizens themselves. All the participants mentioned that the courses were informative, interesting, and facilitated their individual thinking skills.

CONCLUSION

The development and mastering professional skills is an inseparable part of any teacher's career. Educational institutions offer various courses for inservice teachers. What distinguishes the course on e-Learning and Innovative Teaching Techniques organized by the Department of Foreign languages, Mari State University for EFL teachers is its practical orientation aimed at the immediate implementation in schools. Another merit of the course is its research orientation. Independent as well as guided academic research should reflect in the publication and dissemination of its results. In this perspective, the course sets several objectives. The first

one is to disseminate views and research results on teaching aimed at encouraging discussion while at the same time contributing to academic development. The usage of modern methods and technologies in real teaching practice provokes new action research and results evaluation as well as sharing ideas with colleagues within the educational institution.

The course has been approved by the Academic Council of the Mari State University and later by the Ministry of Education of Mari El Republic emphasizing its innovative character and its role in improving the quality of professional training of future and practicing secondary school EFL teachers in the republic.

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