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Electronic means of foreign language learning in the system of higher education

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Integration of information communication technologies, enhancing students' motivation and adding to personalized learning, into higher education is challenging but beneficial. It is particularly acute in the field of foreign language learning which requires language competence formation along with knowledge of grammar patterns, vocabulary specificity and reproductive skills in listening, reading, speaking and writing. The given article reflects the current trends of e-learning of foreign languages to providing insights of teaching and learning practice, theoretical literature review and empirical data gained by students' opinion polls in NRU HSE Nizhniy Novgorod branch. Both advantages and shortcomings are analyzed and the comparison of the traditional classroom education and innovative is carried out. Recent trends in e-learning of foreign languages, use of various tools and numerous techniques are considered.

Key words: Gamification, Wiki sites, e-learning requirements, personalized learning.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning is a complex process of creating an educational space for people to share knowledge and acquire skills via new informational technologies. Its significance for higher education lie in the implementations of information communication technologies that accelerate the process of collection, accumulation, storage, processing and transmission of various data.

Less than 15 years ago, e-learning which implied the use of various forms of ICT as a primary means of learning and teaching (Snyder, 1998; Rosenberg, 2001; Swan et al., 2003), was an experimental way of teaching various technical subjects. Currently, educators across all fields use online training to teach in every sphere of competence. Almost any university or educational institution incorporates e-Learning or blended learning into its programs one way or the other according to the statistics given on the official site of U.S Department of education and English language office in Moscow http://moscow.usembassy.gov/elo.html.

Trends of e-learning

Cloud computing is now a major technology trend. In relation to e-learning, cloud-based LMS services are gaining popularity and have the capacity to reduce operation costs. It provides the opportunity to provide learners with media storage, which can be instantly

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shared by links and found by the key word.

Another trend is gamification, which has existed for quite a long time. Its real influence has been discovered a couple of years ago due to computer technologies' development boost. Gamification makes learning motivating, engaging, and inspiring. It worth noting that American researchers have been using many games in their teaching practice, in particular the following memory games: Memorise the picture, quiz, memory games with cards (Osipov et al., 2015) Gamification in e-learning uses exciting technologies and innovations within the gaming industry. Also, Karl M. Kapp opines that even more is forthcoming with the use of virtual and augmented reality (Kapp, 2012).

In addition, it's been foreseen by the staff of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, that in the near future universities will award degrees with 100% content on Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs). This evidently shows the popularity of MOOC, which is becoming the main stream.

Currently, students learning via MOOCs are getting certificates that will soon translate into credit. A growth area to watch for is the rise of co-branded MOOCs between corporations and established academic universities, where students would prefer paying fees to study rather than enrolling free conventional courses.

Keeping in the forefront of innovations National Research University Higher School of Economics has created several courses in the frames of the project of Open university founded by the leading Russian universities and incorporated a number of MOOCs offered by international teaching community into the curricular .

Thus, the 4th year students of department of Mathematics Informatics and Computer science, whose specialty is engineering programming, have had a must to participate in the massive course devoted to Academic English writing. They enrolled it in October 2016 and it lasted for three month to be followed by tests in December. The given course provides the opportunity to get to know basic principles of essay writing, business correspondence issues and research writing techniques. https://www.coursera.org/specializations/academic-english

Among the recent tendencies, for flipped classrooms, discovery learning, project learning and others, the student oriented learning tops the list (Frolova, N., 2016). It is general knowledge that most university students often feel "out of the picture" concerning their learning and, quite frequently, uninspired or even demotivated and their grades reflect it. Learners do not realize the value of knowledge they are being broadcasted to. However, personalized learning puts the learners in control, allowing them to trace the progress and acquiring the necessary information, creating their own learning track. Learners are also offered choices on ways to learn and educational media that suit their learning style and pace Filatova A, Titova S (2014). The latter seems to be acute for adult learners and disabled ones in particular.

Requirements

When it comes to only sharing knowledge and making learners understand the material better, e-learning is definitely a better choice in contrast to the classroom training. Presenting huge information in the classroom to teach basics of any subject in today's fast paced working environments cannot be said as a preferable choice when you can easily leverage the benefit of e-learning in the form of eBooks, online manuals, Online handbooks, audio and training videos to transmit huge information. In addition, for communicating about values and vision throughout an organization or training people on change management, e-learning can be very effective. It can also ensure a consistent learning experience for learners.

If e-learning courses are developed on the basis of sound instructional designing strategies and adhere to adult learning principles as well, they can be highly beneficial and engaging for the adult learners. These adult learners, who are experienced, self-directed and expected to be busy in their lives (playing multiple roles in lives), like to learn in order to just enhance their present performance in doing some work/task. They are more likely to go after such a course, which can allow them to experiment, practice, perform, and acquire required skills. Adults learn to get their existing performance problem solved. Another factor with adult learners is they like to take time and learn at their own pace, which can become possible in the case of the online training module.

In this way, e-learning courses, which are usually learner-centered, can be very useful for these adult learners. The well-chunked content along with the complimentary real-life interactive scenarios, simulations, problem-solving games, stories, case studies etc., in e-learning courses can highly engage the students more than classroom training which is mainly focused on the presentation of various information, including basics and least, allows for interacting with the course. However, for learners who are not satisfied with technology or tend to lose interest in a self-paced, self-driven eLearning course, the classroom can be a better option.

E-LEARNING EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICE IN HSE AND ITS METHODOLOGY

The National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) is not an exception but it has implemented various information and communication technologies in the educational process and is the member of the pilot project of the Open University, which is supported by leading Russian universities. (https://openedu.ru/university/hse).

E-learning and blended learning are carried out by means of wiki sites, e-learning environment (LMS), and learners' groups in social

networks, webinars and others. Wiki enables project-based learning in real time, when all participants distantly can cooperate in teamwork. . (Lyashenko M, Frolova N, 2014) Wiki spaces allow both formal and informal communication in different role models and dimensions like (student-student, student teacher, tutor-teacher, teacher-student groups). The author of the article has created and used teaching and learning practice correspondingly to several wiki sites https://sites.google.com/site/frolovanh, https://sites.google.com/site/presidentprogrammeprtfolios, https://sites.google.com/site/lmsnnovgorod, https://sites.google.com/site/3rd2016)

The abovementioned web tools can cater for many learning types and are becoming much more of a must have in e -learning.

The fourth generation evaluation principle of Mason (2002) was used while caring out the research**.** Opinion polls and observation were given in the process of learning integration for all students groups. The evaluation of e- learning tools and students' feedback was arranged. Being both a teacher and an evaluator, the author of this article collected and interpreted the data received. While assessing the learning activities, focus was on all findings and personal discoveries of the participants concerning advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. The author used interview and qualitative approach to analyze the results by comparing them with the initial ones.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND E-LEARNING STEPPING STONES

The author of the given article conducted a study with the 3rd year students of the NRU HSE NN. The respondents (more than 40 people) have been mostly positive, in response to the questionnaire on the e -learning efficiency. 87% of the students have confirmed that the system improves teacher-student communication. Thus, the results of the given survey prove the optimization of learning by means of web tools. However, the practice show that due to additional investments requirements and retraining policy, universities authorities are reluctant to switching fully from the traditional learning system to e-learning.

Coming to the cost benefits, based on various research reports statistics, e-learning proves to be more cost-effective than conventional classroom training. Corporate and educational bodies save about 50 to 70% on training, when they replace instructor-led training with e-learning. This is due to reduced or eliminated travel costs and more targeted training (IOMA, 2002). Unlike classroom training, which requires the presence of trainers, each and every time the course is supposed to be delivered, e-learning set can be developed once and used multiple times for the training requirements of the bigger audience.

Furthermore, it is now very easy to develop the e-learning course in quick time following the advent of authoring tools (a 30-minute course can be developed in about 3 to 4 weeks of time by using such authoring tools as Lectora, Articulate etc.). In this way, e-learning development costs are significantly less compared to classroom training.

According to the statistics, not all professional teachers are very optimistic about web tools ant e-learning. In particular, those who are new to e-Learning usually refuse to accept the creation of online courses, usually due to lack of ICT knowledge or computer skills, and many of those who do apply eLearning tend to use the old-fashioned pedagogical methods for their online training, making the whole idea of remote education unreasonable and impractical. The following comments such as «What is the use of these technologies? I can do without them in my high quality teaching practice" are not uncommon.

RESULTS

Both classroom and e-learning techniques are to empower learners with knowledge and skills. Both have their advantages and limitations. The tracking of learners' progress is usually done manually in the classroom situation, which may sometimes result in an incorrect recording of data. The process of assessing learners' progress in the classroom also consumes huge time and manpower. On the other hand, e-learning courses can be delivered on any platform, be it the Learning Management Systems or MOOC, for tracking and monitoring of learners' progress automatically in the course in an efficient manner.

In terms of personalization of education, the issue is controversial, as classroom training allows learners to interact face to face with the instructors or tutors and other learners in the live environment, whereas learners have to depend on electronic media to interact with the course in e-learning. There is always somebody in the classroom to motive and access the performance of learners in the classroom, whereas learners are required to be self-driven and a self-disciplined to enjoy all benefits of e-learning.

Conclusion

Thus, e-learn or not depends on one's requirement and approach towards learning. Although online training resembles many features of classroom training, it also has some unique attributes. The role of the instructor also differs. All these mean that learning and development professionals need to alter their teaching styles, learn new skills, use different methods, master design and development tools, and move away from an instructor-centered methodology to a learner-centered environment.

Conflicts of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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