

MODERN TOOLS APPLICATION IN TRAINING FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN UKRAINE: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Summary

The issue analyzes the subject matter of modern tools represented by “blended learning” in the process of future foreign language teachers’ training in Ukraine. The authors analyze the benefits of the model “blended learning” implementation and the balance between virtual and face-to-face learning in the process of contemporary foreign language teacher’s training.

Two approaches to the definition of the concept “blended learning” are distinguished in higher education. The first approach is based on the introduction of distance courses with active learning methods. The second approach considers the usage of up-to-date virtual technologies in education.

The article questions that the main purpose of using “blended learning” in the process of foreign language teachers’ training is to combine the methods of face-to-face and distance learning that promotes active social interaction of students and their immersion into multimedia content.

The authors conclude that syllabuses in “blended learning” are to be worked out and compiled for particular courses in the way the developers can choose optimal combination of a large number of formal and informal, face-to-face and distance learning options.

Keywords: distance learning, blended learning, information computer technologies (ICT), “face-to-face virtual learning”.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/5112>

1. Introduction

The global challenges the education faces more and more nowadays requires to use new approaches and methods combining face-to-face and virtual learning, and find the balance between them. Another challenge is the democratization of the national education system that is, reforming and modernization: the implementation of human ideas and fundamental values in education, subject oriented approach, reorientation from informational approach to active approach, focus on student’s needs and abilities, developing leadership potential, tolerance towards different cultures the blended learning is aimed at.

Integration of higher education system of Ukraine into European educational environment contributes to the modernization of the curricula of foreign languages specialists’ training as the language is a means of knowledge acquisition on the one hand; it also allows students to understand cultural peculiarities for further communication on different levels, on the other

hand. Modernization of the content of future foreign language teachers' training requires the following tasks in Ukraine: level correlation of foreign language acquisition; determination of new approaches in selection of the content and teaching materials; usage of appropriate forms and types of evaluation and assessment.

2. Ukraine as a governmental member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

In 2008, Ukraine became a full governmental member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education together with 18 country-members of the Bologna Process.

Priority objectives in the context of the Bologna process include the following changes in the system of higher education:

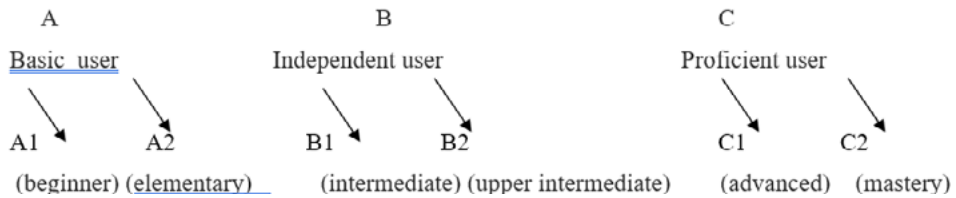
- system of easily understandable and equal to European degrees implementation; issuing the Diploma Supplement for future professional employment of Ukrainian citizens within increasing international competitiveness and standards of European higher education;
- system based on two main stages of education – pre degree and post degree implementation; the access to the second stage of study requires successful completion of the first one lasting at least for three years. The degree/qualification awarded after the first stage of study should be relevant to the European standards; the second stage supposes obtaining Master's Doctorate's degree, as it is in many European countries;
- credit system of the type of ECTS (European system of the transference of credits) implementation for students' mobility within European universities. Credits in the framework of different stages of education are acquired as well as at institutions of higher learning promoting students to lifelong learning;
- students' mobility is promoted by the following steps: students should be provided with access to obtain education and practical training, as well as related services; teachers, researchers and administrative staff should be provided with recognition and crediting of time spent on conducting research, teaching and training in Europe, without violation of their rights;
- promotion of European cooperation in ensuring quality of education for the
- development of appropriate criteria and methodologies of assessment;
- European views on higher education of governmental support, on the development of curricula in particular, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes, joint training programs, practical training and implementation of scientific research (*Kremen, 2004*).

Specific positive changes in organizational and content aspects in the development of language education took place in Ukraine in 2014. According to the Law on "Higher Education", that came in force in September 2014, much attention is paid to the implementation of modern innovative learning technologies (*Zakon Ykrayiny "Pro Vyschy Osvity", 2014*).

Modernization of the content of future foreign language teachers' training requires a balance of knowledge of foreign languages, identification of new approaches to the subject matter and selection of materials, usage of appropriate forms and methods of assessment.

Recommended levels for mastering a foreign language corresponds to A, B and C.

According of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages a specialist should master communicative competence, which consists of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components, what leads to perfection a foreign language at the level of proficient user – C1 and C2 (*Nikolaeva, 2013*).



Scheme 1. Levels of Mastering a Foreign Language

3. Introduction of “blended learning” tools into Ukrainian foreign languages teacher’s training curricula

The Law on “Higher Education” facilitates the introduction of new information and communication technology (hereafter ICT) including “blended learning” into Ukrainian educational process. Therefore, to train future foreign language teachers with a new outlook and more professionally skilled, European projects were introduced in Ukrainian universities: the Tempus project № 544161-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-UK-TEMPUS-JPCR Aston University “Developing the Teaching of European Languages: Modernising Language Teaching through the Development of Blended Masters Programmes” (DeTEL) and Erasmus+ Programme 610427-EPP-1-2019-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP “Foreign Language Teacher Training Capacity Development as a Way to Ukraine’s Multilingual Education and European Integration” (MultiEd).

The priorities of Ukrainian higher education are those areas where the Government of Ukraine considers the European Union experience to be more successfully introduced into the national system of higher education. That is, the importance of quality assurance monitoring at different institutional levels; enhancing training specialist for the needs of a new Ukrainian school, implementation of CLIL approach, hybrid learning system on the basis of “blended learning”; development of effective leadership potential within HEIs; training specialists to be digitally literate with international cooperative and communicative skills; support for student self-governance.

One of the first researchers of distance education in Ukraine V.Kuharenko noted that despite the fact that distance learning provides an opportunity for self-study it also offers a qualitatively new approach to professional training (*Kyharenko, 2002*).

A quite wide range of Ukrainian (O.Andryeyev, V.Bykov, V.Kuharenko, V.Oliynyk) and foreign researches (Ch.R.Graham, G.Dudeney, N.Hockly, B.Tomlinson, C.Whittaker) emphasized high level of efficiency and effectiveness of such kind of training.

Implementation of distance education is quite actual due to the fact that it improves the educational process by realization of such ICT as: Internet, video conferences, blogging, mobile learning and “blended learning”.

From the above-mentioned forms of distance education “blended learning” is the most flexible as it integrates forms of traditional (face-to-face) and distance learning. It provides studying materials in electronic form (on line) and requires definite feedback from a teacher and students electronically and directly in the class.

The notion “blended learning” appeared in corporate teaching in 1999 and was subsequently modified to the system of education in the works of Ch.R.Graham “all learning is blended learning” (*Graham, 2006*).

In 2006 E.Masie offered the following interpretation “... blended learning has always been a major part in the field of training, learning and instructions”.

Furthermore, the concept “blended learning” was widely used in corporate learning, which aims to improve the quality of training, its definition had an ambivalent character for some time. Therefore, “blended learning” is also called hybrid learning or combined/mixed learning (Masie, 2006).

Taking into account the peculiarities of higher education “blended learning” can be interpreted as “a combination of technology and classroom instruction in a flexible approach to learning that recognizes the benefits of delivering some training assessment online with the usage of other models to create a complete training programme which can improve learning outcomes and save costs” (Banados, 2006).

In terms of modernization in Ukrainian educational system modern scholars distinguish two approaches to the definition of the term blended learning. Thus, the first approach is based on the fact that this form of education allows introduction of distance learning courses with active learning methods: basic instructional material is presented in a distance course and its practice and assessment is done in the classroom with the teacher «face-to-face» (Kremen, 2004).

The second approach considers the usage of ICT only during face-to-face learning. Therefore, the main components of such form of education are: content and instrumental aspects that require combination of subject material and forms of its study.

In the process of foreign language teachers’ training “blended learning” has the target to integrate content constituents of the process and learning with methods of material implementation.

Ch.Graham in “Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Design” recommends to follow special steps while applying methods of “blended learning” in a foreign language classroom:

- interaction with the teacher in the classroom – importance to apply “face-to-face” training. The researcher points out that in terms of teaching foreign languages such activity should not be underestimated;
- student autonomy – the ways students independently choose the type of interaction and the course for “blended learning”;
- methods of teaching – teachers’ readiness to work in terms of “blended learning” and technical support provision;
- balance between innovative and productive training – the ways to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of training;
- cultural adaptation – need for adaption training materials for specific groups;
- the use of interactive learning technologies – implementation of “blended learning” for all social backgrounds (Graham, 2006).

Based on previous studies P.Sharma developed five recommendations for language teachers while applying “blended learning”:

- teacher begins classes using video presentations involving students in discussions and using online technologies; as a result, students are required to prepare their own video presentation;
- for obtaining better results it is suggested to use class wiki (electronic page where students can submit their materials);
- necessity to create a podcast (digital media file or series of files that are distributed on the Internet for playing back on portable media players or personal computers;

- importance to use Moodle platform to support virtual educational environment;
- implementation of online diary (blog) where students can share not only their experience but also their achievement (*Sharma, 2007*).

The main purpose of “blended learning” implementation in the process of foreign language teachers’ training is the combination of full-time (face-to-face) and distance learning. Face-to-face elements can be used to attract students to work with different types of ICT under the direct supervision of a tutor or a teacher.

We propose to call “face-to-face virtual learning” activities on different E-Learning educational platforms, namely ZOOM, Google Class and WebEx, etc., unlike Moodle that helps students to organize their self-directed learning. That allows a student to stay “face-to-face with a computer and a teacher” at the same time. That activity enhances the level of student’s involvement into educational process and consequently makes it more productive, as they feel themselves in a familiar and traditional classroom situation that ensures better understanding of the content and appears a chance to communicate during a lesson among students and with a teacher.

Distance learning, both face-to-face with a computer and a teacher (“face-to-face virtual learning”) and self-directed helps students to deepen into multimedia content at any time and any place where there is Internet access. Thus, the combination of two types of learning technology provides flexibility, higher learning outcome, and frees up students’ time.

Another important element of “blended learning” is active social interaction that involves regular communication between a teacher and students, providing direct integration of online and offline content, making training as effective as possible.

It should be noted that training programs in terms of “blended learning” is always developed for specific courses, so teachers can choose optimal combination of a large number of variants of formal and non-formal, full-time and distance learning. This happens because “blended learning” involves carefully planned sequence of different types of training activity (*Ogienko, 2012*).

Therefore, to develop an effective course for “blended learning” we should consider the following:

- “blended learning” should always be clearly focused. To achieve the goal of learning all the tasks (useful electronic resources) should have a single goal. Students need to have the opportunity to make decisions in the process of education and be aware of their abilities, though in learning content they should follow teachers’ advice.

- “blended learning” is based on systematic approach. All exercises and presentation of information should be presented systematically and logically. It is desirable to develop a convenient schedule, identify the target audience, choose the main course material and appropriate methods of working with it, evaluate and take into account the limitations that exist in connection with the budget and technologies to implement e-learning platform.

- working out appropriate forms of assessment of students’ knowledge and skills (introduction of various forms of assessment);

- correlation of teaching methods. According to the works of foreign researchers, the ratio of teaching time is distributed as follows: 75% is distance learning (online) and 25% classroom learning (face-to-face) (*Dudeny, Hockly, 2007*).

Like any system of education “blended learning” has several drawbacks and advantages. The advantages are the following: usage of both traditional and distance learning, that allows students to use not only discussion, but also other kinds of interactive tasks, knowledge acquisition is done in a new way contributing to reflection and increase of students' motivation.

As to disadvantages, lack of social language environment has limited the possibility of free access to interactive contemporary sources, teachers lack experience of using modern ICT in teaching, low teachers' awareness of modern methods of system design and development concepts of Web 1.0., Web 2.0. and Web 3.0.

4. Conclusions

“Blended learning” is a modern and advanced learning tool that combines traditional – face-to-face and distance learning to organize flexible learning in order to train foreign language teachers. Still, there is a need for a number of improvements to be done in the educational environment: the adoption of methods and technologies in language learning system, the introduction of hybrid teaching methods (on the basis of “blended learning”) and applying students' practical application of the subjects.

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