TEACHING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Practice shows that one of the urgent and most important tasks of Russian society is modernization of higher education. In recent years, higher school in Russia has undergone significant changes, but still needs to be updated, as common methods and ways of organizing learning don't entirely meet the demands of modernity: a contemporary society needs people with a critical facility and marked initiative, who are active, competent and self-developing.

Teachers-practitioners and scholars increasingly focus on the search for the ways of teaching university students a foreign language being aimed at developing the ability of continuous self-improvement. To be in demand in a labour market a graduate must not only get education and to learn social roles and rules but also be flexible in adapting quickly and effectively in case of changes in this market. It is necessary being able to understand a science to create something new, transforming oneself and the world around him / her.

The main objective of educational policy in Russia is the creation of effective conditions for the formation of favourable learning environment appropriate to the current and future needs of modern life. The use of didactic facilities of ICT allows teachers to organize foreign language teaching university students at a qualitatively new level. E-learning environment has significant didactic advantages over other electronic means, especially when it comes to the use of this resource for the organization of independent work in learning a foreign language by students of a particular non-linguistic learning profile.

The didactic value of e-learning environment is both acute in the organization of the communication process of university students, and implementation of monitoring the educational process quality. It should be noted that along with the significant advantages of the use of e-learning environment in teaching university students a foreign language, there is also a number of difficulties in its development and application.

1 INTRODUCTION

Creating the most effective conditions for the realization of the goals and objectives of teaching a foreign language in high school is one of priorities of national education policy. Thanks to rapid development of information technologies, methods and ways of organizing learning in higher educational institutions require new approaches to the educational process.

The majority of graduates of Russian universities are experiencing difficulty applying for a job with a degree. According to the HR services of Russia, only 40% of young professionals start the career in their field of specialization. This is partly due to the fact that educational programs of the universities provide the students mostly with fundamental knowledge while development of practical skills need more practice [Shulgina, 2015]. The researchers study the role of independent work in educational process, develop the ways of its effectiveness by introducing appropriate teaching methods [Kolesova, 2013].

2. DISCUSSIONS

Researchers define "e-learning environment" differently. According to E.N. Zaitseva it is "virtual learning environment" [Zaiteva, 2003]. O.P. Kryukova calls it "integrated learning environment" [Kryukova, 1998]. E. Vakhtina calls "e-learning environment" "information-communication learning environment" [Vakhtina, 2015], mentioning that it differs from traditional learning environment by providing new tools, forming another space of interaction between students and teachers through the use of digital learning means that implement the information-communication technologies.

Experts in the field of information communication technologies in education consider e-learning environment to consist of five blocks: a value-oriented component (the set of goals and values that may be important for the development of goals of learning and teaching achievement); program-methodical component (essential information regarding possible strategies, forms and training programs); information and knowledge component (system knowledge and skills of the student, forming the basis of his professional activities, as well as determining the properties of cognitive activity, affecting the efficiency); communication component (forms of interaction between participants of educational process) and process component (meaning the instruction used in the information-educational environment (in particular, the use of new information technologies, including telecommunications of networks).

Modern approaches to the environment in pedagogy are in line with the developmental function of education and integrative quality-learning environment is the ability of this environment to ensure that all participants of the educational system possess the capacity to effectively leach personal self-development. In a number of theoretical approaches that have been implemented in practice, we can distinguish three basic types of environments:

• environment-oriented knowledge representation;

• environment-oriented and independent activity for the acquisition of knowledge;

• mixed type of environments [Vostroknutov, 2002, Kryukova, 1998].

In creating the environments of the first type dominated by the cognitive approach, the basis of which is the reliance on the internal structure of human knowledge on systemic-structural properties of the studied object. They define the nature and direction of learning opportunities and forms of participation of the learner. The second type of environments in most foreign studies (M. Warschauer, R. Li, R. Hart) is considered from the standpoint of their activity-based approach. Understanding the environment is based on the concept of gaining knowledge in the process of the project activities developed in the framework of constructivist cognitive science [Vostroknutov, 2002].

Analysis of modern Russian and foreign research shows that in recent years the most actively forming medium of the third type, which integrate both approaches, i.e. represent a source of educational-methodical knowledge and at the same time highly structural environment for the organization of various forms of independent educational activities of the learners (J.M. Nasonova, A.I. Neronov, N.G. Alaya, Y. Yano). In the formation of independent educational activity in e-learning environmentwe need to pay attention to such

factors as emotional colour of the language material, its significance, the degree of connection with the main activity, personal characteristics of the subjects [Zaiteva, 2003].

Studies show that the means of new information technologies have the following characteristics:

• they can create optimal conditions for the organization of independent learning activities;

• they are able of exercising control and self-control of educational process;

• they can implement an effective feedback, diagnostics and error correction;

• theycompensate the absence of natural foreign-language environment at all stages of education;

• theyimplement different methods of presentation of educational material;

• theycreate a wide range of incentives for involvement of trainees in foreign language speech activity [Agaeva et al., 2015].

As noted by M.G. Evdokimova e-learning environment can act as a "modeling environment of foreign language communication; a source of authentic foreign language teaching materials of different levels of complexity, providing access to foreign information resources; environment creation and updating of professionally significant products of learning activities" [Evdokimova, 2007]. When learning a foreign language in e-learning environment information and communication technologies present additional challenges: the perception and recognition of human speech, including analysis of its semantic content (understanding); synthesis of human speech; recognition and analysis associated with the speech of non-verbal images.

As noted in several theoretical and practical studies (E.G. Azimov, L.S. Kamensky, N.V. Klemesheva, O.P. Kryukova, I.P. Pavlova, E.S. Polat, E.S. Yarotskaya, K. Smith), the optimal organization of educational process in e-learning environment by information and communication technologies depends on the rational use by the teacher of didactic opportunities of the computer while:

• inclusion in the educational process and educational tools;

• harnessing the potential of telecommunication technologies;

• planning, organization and management of independent work of students;

• conducting research work in order to improve the efficiency of the educational process.

Based on the fact that theinformation and communication technologies need to enter a set of tools that enable a systematic integration of new information technologies in the educational process, we need to highlight which didactic possibilities of information and communication technologies can be used for organization of study at the University in the course of the English language study:

- educational computer programs;

- educationalweb-sites;

- grammar, vocabulary, etc. linguistic tests online.

It is also necessary to stress that the organization of independent work of students in e-learning environment with information and communication technologies facilities contributes significantly to the development of the students' creative abilities, mastering all kinds of speech activity, formation and development of skills of independent work on foreign language material, the development of key competences. New educational standards of higher education of Russia are aimed at increasing the role of competence approach in training specialists. This is evidenced by common cultural and professional competences, which the student should master after the course "Foreign language".

According to the new Federal educational standards, graduates of all undergraduate programs must possess, such as cultural competence the ability to communicate in oral and written forms in foreign languages for solving problems in interpersonal and intercultural interaction. This "ability" is the result of formation of foreign communicative competence is a fundamental task of the language policy of universities of Russia specializing in natural sciences. In the course of its decision the teachers of these universities face many challenges:

- different education level of students (this is basically the problem of students of non-linguistic specialties);

- insufficient number of classroom hours so that students experience difficulty in forming communicative-

speech abilities and development of foreign language communicative competence at the level necessary to implement a wide range of professional tasks;

- insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the training process, which allows to make timely adjustments to the educational trajectory;

- insufficient use of such techniques or learning technologies that give a positive result in a relatively short period of training;

- insufficient attention to the development of skills of independent work on language material [Kolesova, 2016].

In these circumstances, improving the quality of teaching and the achievement of its objectives must occur due to the updating the educational process alongside with high professionally oriented foreign language competence of University teachers and the development of foreign language communicative competence of students [Astafiev, 2013]. We support the researchers (G.M. Gaponov, E.I. Mashbits, P.I. Pidkasistyy, V.I. Zagvyazinskiy) pointing out that many freshmen study below the actual level of their abilities due to insufficient development of independent work skills. So one of the tasks of higher education is to teach students to learn: to be able to further develop their skills, abilities; to enrich their knowledge on their own in order to apply it in practice. This statement is especially acute under the conditions of increasing competitiveness in the world labourmarkets when the knowledge of foreign languages becomes one of the main criteria of professional competence. A lot of native and foreign fundamental researches have been devoted to the problem of independent work organization (V.I. Andreev, N.A. Biryukova, J. Bruner, B.P. Esipov, E.A. Golant, H. Hiebsch, J. Higgins, M. Higgins, H. Holec, J. Green, D. Klein, T.V. Kolesova, D.A. Kolb, I.Y. Lerner, D. Raphan, M.N. Skatkin, J. Underwood, J.A. Van Ek, M. Wong, etc.) [Biryukova, 2015; Kolesova, 2010, 2016].

Analysis of scientific-methodical literature, the study of e-learning and educational space of universities, own experience witness a number of methodological directions and techniques for improving the educational process in teaching foreign language students of non-linguistic specialties. First of all it is the use of information technology, particularly e-learning platform MOODLE, which has significant didactic advantages over other means of learning, since the learning in this environment is based on general didactic principles of education:

- the principle of communicative approach implying the involvement of university studentsinto oral and written communication throughout the whole course of learning English;

- the principle of durability implying the ability of students to remember linguistic and language material they learn of ready access (for oral or written communication);

- the principle of conscious approach to language learning implying that the language material should be acquired consciously;

- the principle of activity implying that students should be active participants in the learning process as well as motivated and interested in language learning;

- the principle of visualization which makeseducational process emotionally coloured;

- the principle of individualization implying the ability of students to choose their own strategy of education;

- the principle of cooperation while solving group tasks, the possibility of exchanging educational information with other students or a teacher.

Introduction of e-learning in universities requiresintegration of software, hardware and psychological-pedagogical means and conditions for effective maintenance and operation the educational process, therefore and there new requirements for its teaching methods [Toktarova, 2013].

3. METHODOLOGY

All the students at Mari state university are taught English on the basis of e-learning platform MOODLE due to its significant advantages:

- the availability of training at any convenient time;

- the use of educational materials in electronic form (available free of charge, replicated);

- regular monitoring of training;

- the possibility of organizing training in the process of joint solution of educational tasks, i.e. the implementation of knowledge exchange;

- the ability to use various types of educational tasks aimed at development of all types of speech activity: listening, speaking, reading, writing;

- the possibility of equipping the educational process with methodological recommendations to study the discipline more effectively.

All training courses of "Foreign language" have a uniform modular structure:

- informative module (course title, information about the author of the course);

- normative documents module (work program of the course, Federal state standard of a specialty, etc.);

- support discipline resources (electronic textbooks, e-dictionaries, hyperlinks to necessary Internet resources, etc.);

- methodology support module (methodical recommendations for teachers, and methodical recommendations for students, knowledge assessment fund (collection of tests, requirements for examination and credit tests, etc.);

- course themes modules (laboratory and independent works).

The contents of course themes modules should be studied in detail. These modules include various types of works: some topic investigation, tests, forums, chats, lectures (theoretical and practical material with test components). In each theme the designed tasks are to review grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening skills.

Learning in this educational environment allows realizing the task of teaching professionally-oriented foreign language, since it allows to locate and effectively use:

- acute e-tutorials for a specific learning profile with audio and video application;

- tests-simulators for training of professionally oriented reading;

- theoretical, practical and test material for teaching grammar, depending on the profile of learning, etc.

One more advantage of e-learning environment of learning English by university students is the organization of individual work of students.

The pedagogical conditions of effective organization of individual work of students on the platform of MOODLE include activization of independent educational activity of student formation and development of value attitude to the subject. We support A.A. Khusainova that "the value attitude to the subject studied" begins to form when students begin to study professional topics material" [Khusainova, 2013]. Besides,the increase of interactivity of e-learning environment results in active communication of students during learning activities.

According to A.A. Khusainova, while working in MOODLE "special emphasis should be put on the communicative the role of the educational system"as the e-learning platform allows students to develop a positive attitude to discussions and cooperation with the teacher. The communication process is based on active learning methods, including a high degree of involvement and interaction of students among themselves; a high level of motivation, the use of gaming techniques, project method, discussions, oral and written presentations, etc. On the other hand organization of individual work of students in e-learning environment MOODLE is quite difficult to be reached. As we have mentioned above, first year students have different education level caused by different abilities of individual work organization.

In e-learning environment increasing intensity of interaction of information exchange and redistribute functions among the participants of the learning process, which directly affect the change of organizational forms and methods of training. In addition, we must consider such psychological factor as internalization: the formation of internal means of mental activity owing to active reflection in consciousness of the external means used in the context of learning activities [Vakhtina, 2015; Krasilnikova, 2016].

4. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, the use of e-learning platform is a supporting element of learning a foreign language, and we are still in the process of determining its actual effectiveness. However, we are sure this educational resource fits never better the process of learning a foreign language in high school, which aims at developing students' foreign language communicative competence.

Didactic potential of information technologies and methods of their use for the purpose of learning a foreign language are still under development. Currently the development of information resources in electronic form for foreign language learning are fragmented and have the particular solutions due researches into scientific and methodological basis, a clear understanding of the technical and methodological problems of application of new information technologies in the process of learning a foreign language.

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