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FOREIGN LANGUAGE BLENDED LEARNING AT HIGHER SCHOOLS IN UKRAINE

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The report deals with five Ukrainian higher schools experience in application of blended learning for foreign languages instruction that could be used at other home and foreign higher educational institutions. There the advantages and disadvantages, general reasons of blended learning application instead of distance one are described and the peculiarities of their own experience are reported and demonstrated by each author.

Key words: blended learning, Bologna process, Internet, distance course, online language resources

While the countries of Europe are forming the European Union, a political union of European countries, the concept of common European educational and research space is being formed, bringing together teaching and learning standards, educational models, and teaching objectives, which is revealed in Sorbonne and Bologna declarations. The major goal of Bologna process is to create the common all-European educational system, a strong and competitive system of education which would enhance economic strength of the United Europe. To join “the Bologna club” Ukraine needs to perform a number of measures by 2010 aimed at “modernizing” our education. Now we are at the starting point of considerable changes in our educational system.

“Bologna process” stipulates for innovative changes in educational methods and strategies, i.e. the use of module and rating distance systems of assessment, the increased role of autonomous student learning, the creation of academic programs tailored to individual student needs, as well as the increased educational financial standing and foundation.

This paper aims to present different ways in which new technologies and the Internet can be used to enhance teaching English as a foreign language in some higher educational institutions of Ukraine; to highlight the reasons for and outcomes of these innovations; and to show the prospects for the use of new technologies in other higher educational institutions of Ukraine.

In our country it is still not feasible to successfully introduce distance education (DE) at the territory of Ukraine as a whole, which is caused by a number of reasons: low Internet connection in Ukraine, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, high cost of the Internet access, high cost of virtual learning environments which serve as a platform for creating distance courses (DC) and organizing DE process, as well as high cost of computers and licensed software, which leads to only a small amount of population and educational institutions being able to purchase it [8]. A survey [4] conducted at the beginning of 2003/2004 academic year among the third-year students majoring in linguistics at the Department of Applied Linguistics (Institute of Computer Sciences and Information Technologies at Lviv Polytechnic National University) showed that 80 out of 194 students did not have a computer at home, and only one fifth of respondents (39) had access to the Internet. Students in the majority of other educational institutions have even fewer opportunities to work with the Internet resources using modern hardware and software.

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, even those Universities and Institutes, which purchased or developed software necessary to organize distance education courses, the so-called virtual learning environment (VLE), can make use of it only partially. Therefore, in our opinion, distance education can be introduced in educational institutions within high speed Internet connection areas, e.g. educational institutions in district (oblast) centers, in the case when students have necessary hardware and software at home or at work, and have sufficient access to the Internet. In other cases the components of distance education, e.g. e-mail, e-mailing lists, discussion forums, chats, freely available Ukrainian distant courses (there were more than 200 DC in Ukraine in 2002), can be used in class, i.e. the so-called blended learning could be introduced [9].

Blended learning is understood as the traditional face-to-face type of learning which involves on-line learning as an additional component of the class. Another interpretation of the term is the inclusion of traditional face-to-face teaching and learning elements into online (virtual) learning process. In most cases blended learning is viewed as a combination of distance and traditional teaching and learning [11].

In this paper blended learning is viewed as a combination of distance and traditional types of learning, while the teaching and learning resources for DL or e-learning are distance courses created with the use of virtual learning environment (platforms, software) and Web-courses. Here we will provide a number of examples of how traditional full-time or part-time learning can be combined with distance course components, as well as provide the examples of distance learning courses in foreign languages at higher schools of Ukraine.

Within the TEMPUS/TACIS project a “Web-based learning system” (WBLS) has been developed at Automated Control Systems Department of the Institute of Computer Sciences and Information Technologies at Lviv Polytechnic National University. Using this software as a platform, distance courses in some subjects, including English, have been created and introduced at the Department [6]. The audiences for the courses have been students of Automated Control Systems Department as well as Printing and Publishing Department. At present these resources are used for blended learning courses within the local intranet of the Department.

Another example of blended learning is the use of elements of the distance English course developed by B. Shunevych for the students at Open International University of Human Development “Ukraine” (Kyiv) which was tested with Extra-Mural Department first-year students at five departments where English is not a major. Blended learning was introduced in the form of consultations through individual e-mails, discussions at e-mailing lists, and doing exercises uploaded to the IATP server to test students’ knowledge during 2001/2002 academic year. At the time of the experiment there were not sufficient opportunities to ensure students’ work via the Internet, therefore, students and teachers studied and worked mostly in the IATP computer class [7].

Due to low Internet connection, the researchers at the Laboratory for Distance Education Problems at National Technical University “Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute” have developed *Web-Class KhPI* software, which provides an opportunity to store files of big size (audio and video files, pictures, animation etc) on the CDs. All instructors and students who work with a specific distance course are supplied with these discs, while communication between students, instructors and students, as well participation in the discussion board and chats are being performed via the Internet [2].

In April and May of 2004 a virtual distance course, compiled by B. Shunevych within *Web-Class KhPI* virtual learning environment was used for blended and distance learning of students at seven Universities and Academies of Ukraine. Students were asked to work with the introductory lesson of Module 1 and to complete Module 6 (Traveling) of the DC with English ESP texts added, as well as exercises and short texts on “Careers in Computing” topic. The ESP component of the course was intended for the students who major in computer sciences; therefore, mostly students specializing in computer sciences were invited to participate in the course. These were students of seven Ukrainian Universities and Academies (see table 1).

Other instructors of English at these Institutions, as well as instructors of other subjects and professionals involved in introducing DE, observed the procedure of distance learning during the experiment, in order to start themselves teaching course or only its components in 2004-2005 academic years. For example, O. Musiyovska, a senior lecturer of Foreign Languages Department at Ukrainian Academy of Publishing, has used the DC compiled by B. Shunevych within *Web-Class KhPI* VLE, and developed ESP assignments for this course for the first-year students majoring in Printing and Publishing (Муційовська та ін. 2003) and Yu. Yaremenko, a senior lecturer of Foreign Languages Department at the Institute of Philology (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv) has used the same course uploaded to *ILLIAS* platform, and developed the ESP component for students majoring in radiophysics and electronics [10].

Besides the above-mentioned cases of blended learning introduced in higher educational institutions of Ukraine, there are those where foreign languages have been studied with the use of distance learning platforms.

TABLE 1

List of participants of English Language Distance Course from higher educational institutions of Ukraine
(April-May 2004)

№	Name of Institution	Students	Teachers	Researchers	Specialists	Σ
1.	KNU					
	a) Department of Radio-Physics	10	2			12
	б) Geography Department	10	1			11
	в) Institute of Philology		1			1
2.	UU		1		2	3
3.	NTU “KhPI”	6	2	2		10
4.	LPNU	2	1	1	1	5
5.	IAP	6	1			7
6.	LSU	3	1			4
7.	LA EU	3	1			4
	Total	40	11	3	3	57

Note. KNU – Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, UU – Open International University of Human Development “Ukraine”, NTU “KhPI” - National Technical University “Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute”, LPNU – Lviv Polytechnic National University, UAP – Ukrainian Academy of Printing, LSU – Lviv Stavropihion University, LA EU – Lviv Affiliate of European University of Finances, Information Systems, Management and Business.

Starting with 1999 at least seven English language distance courses have been created, three French language distance courses have been developed, and three (English, German and French language) course for creating student portfolios have been introduced in Ukraine.

Associate professor Pavlova T. in collaboration with Dr. Synytsia K. and Dr. Manako A., senior researchers of International Research and Education Center, have developed a Web-course to study Business English, which is now successfully used to teach students at International University of Finances (IUF). The course is intended for distance students of higher educational institutions. This course is taught to IUF students who get their second higher education degree in Economics, to graduate students of other educational institutions, as well as to University graduates who are willing to improve their knowledge of English. This course, alongside with the course developed by B. Shunevych for students’ self-studying, and the three French language courses have been developed with the use of *LearningSpace* virtual learning environment and have been placed at the Ukrainian Center of Distance Education (UCDE) Web-site: <http://udec.ntu-kpi.kiev.ua>. French language distance courses are aimed at preparation to DELF1, DELF2 and DALF examinations. After completing the course the students receive certificates issued by the UCDE and the Embassy of France in Ukraine.

English distance courses for beginners and Business English distance courses were developed with the use of WebCT platform in 1999 within the joint project of UDL System (Ukrainian System of Distance Learning) between Loyola College (USA) and Lviv Institute of Management. *English for Beginners* course developed by L. Zakal, is intended for those interested in acquiring practical skills of English, while *Business Communication* course by V. Loboda gives an opportunity to study the standards of effective business communication in English (both oral and written), understand the specific features of intercultural business communication, and acquire language skills necessary to start a business career (<http://www.udl.org.ua>).

NTU “KhPI” Web-site presents three distant courses for ESP students at higher educational institutions of Ukraine, including the course developed by B. Shunevych for the first-year ESP students (<http://users.kpi.kharkov.ua/lre>).

Besides the above mentioned electronic distance courses, in 1996 the instructors of Lviv Institute of Banking in collaboration with their colleagues from British *Instructional design company* developed and still use *Business language modules* (in English, German and French languages) for case technology of distance learning [1], [3], [5].

Conclusions

It is important to make the maximal use of available online language resources at home and in educational institutions, e.g. e-mail, e-mailing lists, forums, chats, available Ukrainian and International foreign language courses, as well as to use in class the elements of distance courses created independently.

Incorporating new technologies and the Internet into language learning enhances the opportunity: 1) to help students use new technologies in their work and studies; 2) to increase the access to educational materials for students, who due to a number of reasons (illness, high cost of educational materials, cost of xero-copies etc) can not have full access to the class resources; 3) to lead discussion forums on the topical issues, as well as address the questions students pose during the course of studies; 4) to be informed about the current Ukrainian and international news and have an opportunity to discuss them freely; 5) to organize independent work of the students who cannot attend classes due to different reasons.

B. Shunevych has developed the English distance course for the first-year ESP students and adapted it for the use on four types of virtual learning environment which increased the possibilities for the use of DC at higher educational institutions of Ukraine. The specific feature of the distance course made with the use of *LearningSpace* VLE, is that it gives an opportunity for the students to work autonomously without the tutor, but it is a prerequisite that students have high Internet connection. Also, fast Internet connection is necessary to work with ILIAS free resource, but the course features include the tutor's participation. There are two other higher schools where students study distantly with the tutor, but for *Web-Class KhPI* (National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnical Institute") and *WBLC* (Lviv National Polytechnic Institute) virtual learning environments it is possible that students have low Internet connection, since in the first case the students can get big size files on the CD, and in the second case they work in local intranet.

Research findings of involving students into international cross-cultural projects show that using Web-resources helps to increase the general level of students' education, develop communicative aspects of writing and reading, and enhance computer literacy and cross-cultural awareness.

Taking into account the present state of level of the Internet access, availability of hardware and software for individuals and educational institutions, it is possible to use the suggested ways of blended learning in other educational institutions of Ukraine.

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