



MOODLE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract:

As a global lingua franca, English language is the main and necessary standard in everyday communication today. The lack of knowledge of English can be a huge obstacle to scientific papers reading, international cooperation, scientific papers presentation and career progress. For all the above mentioned reasons, English is compulsory, two- semester course during all four years of undergraduate academic studies in all faculties at Singidunum University, both for regular students and DLS (distance learning system) students. Moodle platform is the main tool for foreign language learning for DLS students. This paper presents the analysis of the usage of Moodle in English language teaching at Singidunum University, as well as all advantages and disadvantages that the platform has. All functions of platform are taken into consideration, both for vocabulary teaching and for all four language skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking). The aim of the paper is to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of Moodle platform in English language teaching in order to use online learning as an additional tool in regular lectures.

Key words:

Moodle,
distance learning,
the English language

INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, the English language became the main communicative tool not only among native speakers of English and in the countries, former British colonies, but also in the vast majority of countries, where English is very important part of their education system. It is more than obvious that the English language today is global lingua franca and everyday communication will be aggravated if we are not fluent in English. The English language knowledge is essential when it comes to scientific papers reading, international cooperation, presentation of papers at international conferences etc.

On the other hand, we live in the so-called digital era, so being computer literate is a prerequisite. Contemporary information technologies, which became an important part of our everyday life, are being used in education, especially in teaching English as a foreign language. Modern way of life is closely related to the concept of permanent learning and improving the so-called lifelong learning concept, which led to the introduction of distance learning and computer assisted language learning. There are great number of softwares and tools, as well as learning platforms, which are used for language learning as well.

At Singidunum University, we use Moodle platform, which is very suitable for language learning. In this paper, we will show you what Singidunum University students think about distance language learning and what are, according to them, the main advantages and disadvantages of this learning method.

Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is one of the most popular programmes for e-learning. Moodle is software solution for creation and organization of online courses via the Internet. The project is being continually developed and improved. Moodle is flexible and fast open-source tool. Great popularity of this tool is based on very simple and fast installation, modest demands when it comes to computer resources, simple integration in the existing systems and logical interface for both teachers and students. Moodle became very popular among teachers due to its pedagogical basis and adaptiveness to the academic environment. Currently, over 49 600 educational institutions, in more than 210 countries, have registered Moodle sites (www.moodle.org/stats). Moodle is used in public and private schools, universities and corporations for additional education of personnel. Users are various, from pupils in elementary schools to graduate and postgraduate students.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF MOODLE PLATFORM

Moodle platform offers many benefits to Distant Learning System students. It uses the Internet as a medium. The idea of the platform or so-called virtual classroom is very similar to real classroom. It gives students the opportunity to communicate with their teachers. It also provides them with all the materials and activities that teachers cover with students at lectures. The advantages of using Moodle for teaching and learning the English language correspond to the advantages of DLS studying in general.



Firstly, students have the opportunity to learn English in an interesting way, which is different from what they are accustomed to. Moodle is not difficult to use and most students learn how to use this system in about 30 minutes of short training [1].

The best way to learn a language is through direct communication with teachers. However, there are many advantages of online communication compared to direct communication [2] :

- 1) Flexibility. This way of communication enables students' access to teaching materials at any time and from any place.
- 2) Additional time for considering possible answers. Before students decide to take part in a discussion, they can study the topic thoroughly. They have enough time to think over their ideas and answers.
- 3) Anonymity. According to research results, students are more willing to take part in a discussion if anonymity is guaranteed.
- 4) There are no time zone limits. This is very important because many DLS students live far away from the place where the university is located.
- 5) Cost-effectiveness. The services needed for this way of learning do not imply the usage of expensive computers and high quality Internet traffic.

One of the important advantages of using Moodle platform for English language learning (as well as for learning foreign languages in general) is that students have the opportunity of using multimedia tools and applications, such as images, sounds, animations [3]. In this way students practice four language skills – speaking, listening, writing and reading. In addition to this, English language course platforms have e-dictionaries where students can find the explanations for all terms and phrases from their student's books. Furthermore, students are offered links to best online dictionaries.

After every teaching unit students can test their knowledge by doing exercises and activities which check their grammar, vocabulary, listening and writing skills (there is an e-dictation option as well). These progress tests can be taken as many times as students want. The results can be seen immediately.

Exams and assessment tests taken on the Moodle platform are organised according to the tests done at the University in the presence of teachers. Exam questions are similar to those taken by regular students, and they can be taken within a specified period of time, only once.

The elements for creating courses on Moodle platform are divided into two categories: Resources and Activities [3]. These elements are used in accordance with the course needs. The usage of a specific element depends on the course material. Web pages are the most useful resource for creating courses. They contain text contents, usually with grammar or vocabulary. There are also simple text pages, links and directory displays. When it comes to activities, Lesson is one of the most useful activity for learning foreign languages. One lesson is composed of a number of web pages. Lessons can contain a variety of

different contents, according to the needs of the course. Depending on the content, navigation can be simple or very complex. Option Lesson can include power point presentations as well, which makes it adequate for grammar and vocabulary acquisition. One of the best activities for the interaction between students and teachers is the option Forum. Within this option students can ask their teachers questions about lexical and grammatical units. External files (attachments) can also be uploaded within this activity. Another two options for communication with teachers are Chat and Journal.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF MOODLE PLATFORM

Having in mind that Moodle is not primarily created as a tool for language learning, it should come as no surprise that it does not present the perfect model for online learning [4]. Even though it displays numerous advantages and advanced learning methods, it quite often meets negative reactions of students and teachers when it comes to the acquisition of English as a foreign language. Some technical difficulties and pedagogical challenges must not be ignored when we use Moodle platform in the classroom. The biggest obstacles which English language teachers are faced with are, above all, technical issues, i.e. computer (il) literacy and training, advanced development of new technologies which are often difficult for teachers to acquire and follow, students' identity confirmation during online testing and the issue of treating errors, i.e. the question of which type of errors should be marked and how to offer students the appropriate feedback regarding the mistakes made. (Wen- Shuenn, 2008: 53).

Furthermore, it has also been noticed that there is a lack of educational material in online English language teaching [4]. Despite the fact that Moodle platform offers detailed instructions to teachers about posting and organization of materials for English language learning, as well as for assessing and marking posted tests, teachers should still own an advanced level of computer literacy and have specific knowledge about the university server and its technical possibilities [5]. If teachers cannot answer all platform demands, they might be faced with personal frustrations and animosity toward this teaching method.

Apart from teachers, of course, students' competences are of crucial importance for English language learning by Moodle platform. Students can face the same obstacles and problems as their teachers- the lack of computer literacy and IT skills, the necessity for technical training for platform usage, but also the question of personal motivation which is highlighted in this case. In other words, it has been noticed that students find it more difficult to organize themselves alone and to save some time for learning English alone by platform than to attend lectures and participate in teamwork [6]. Research has shown that the biggest obstacles of Moodle platform for students are the following [1] :

- 1) Fuzziness – too many icons on the platform makes it more complicated for students to understand it,



- 2) It is difficult to follow or understand the tasks based only on the given explanation from the platform,
- 3) Problems with log in,
- 4) Limited chat: when more than 10 people are included in chat, it becomes slower,
- 5) Not all the content which could be interesting for students can be posted on the platform.

Apart from this, students very often complain about the lack of personal contact, i.e. about slow interaction with their teachers. The specific example is the time spent waiting on the teachers' response regarding an e-mail question connected with platform tasks [1]. Moreover, the disadvantage that is often highlighted by students is the impossibility to participate in group discussion about a certain topic from the platform, as well as the impossibility to hear someone else's opinion and to participate in English language conversation with their colleagues [6].

The general attitude of students towards English language learning by Moodle platform is that this method of electronic learning is easier, but less efficient, and with more disadvantages than advantages [6].

THE RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH

Anonymous questionnaire has been posted for students on the Moodle platform of Singidunum University in the period from 1st March till 20th March 2014. Students have been asked to answer the following questions:

1. What are, in your opinion, the advantages of Moodle platform for English language learning?
2. What are, in your opinion, the disadvantages of Moodle platform for English language learning?
3. How could the platform be modified for more efficient English language learning?

Twenty students have filled in the questionnaire- 75% females and 25 % males. The age of 55 % of students is from 35 to 50, 30 % of students are aged from 25 to 35 and 15 % of students are aged from 18 to 25. Based on the questionnaire results, it has been concluded that the biggest advantages of English language learning by Moodle, according to students, are the possibility of using multimedia tools, the possibility of using the platform anytime and anywhere, which is quite important for students who are employed, numerous tests for self- evaluation, good organization and transparency of the platform, easily available material for exams preparation, and the possibility of quick search of the teaching material. As the only disadvantage, the students highlight the lack of interaction with their teachers, i.e. the impossibility to use the language actively.

Students also think that English language learning by the platform can be improved by uploading audio/ video materials which consist of real business and life situations such as phone call simulations, job interviews, business meetings, etc. It has also been suggested that occasional online office hours (by Skype) should be organized, which is especially relevant for students who work and live abroad and have no possibilities of personal contact with their teachers.

CONCLUSION

Moodle platform certainly represents a desirable and necessary form of additional tool for English language learning at all faculties at Singidunum University. The platform enables students to learn independently of time and space, but it also offers transparency, good organization and students' self- evaluation.

On the other hand, the platform also has several disadvantages, the main one being the lack of interaction and live contact between students and teachers and the lack of speaking activities.

Having in mind that it was not primarily created for language learning, Moodle platform cannot be the perfect tool for English language teaching and learning, regardless of the willingness and efforts of both students and teachers. However, as it is constantly being improved in all aspects, there are indication that in the future the Moodle platform might be even more successful tool by which English language skills can be acquired.

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Appendix- Questionnaire Example

Upitnik- Prednosti i mane Moodle platforme za učenje engleskog jezika

Molimo sve zainteresovane studente i studentkinje da popune anonimnu anketu. Rezultati ankete će biti objavljeni u naučno- istraživačkom radu pod nazivom ‘Moodle u nastavi engleskog jezika’ čije su autorke prof. Tijana Gajić, prof. Ivana Tomić i prof. Valentina Bošković. Rad je pisan za međunarodnu stručnu konferenciju Sinteza koja će se održati na Univerzitetu Singidunum u aprilu. Hvala!

* Required

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Pol * | Broj godina * |
| <input type="radio"/> Muški | <input type="radio"/> 18- 25 |
| <input type="radio"/> Ženski | <input type="radio"/> 25- 35 |
| | <input type="radio"/> 35- 50 |
| | <input type="radio"/> 50- 60 |

Zanimanje *

Koje su, po Vašem mišljenju, prednosti Moodle platforme za učenje engleskog jezika? *

Koje su, po Vašem mišljenju, mane Moodle platforme za učenje engleskog jezika? *

Kako bi se Moodle platforma mogla unaprediti za efikasnije učenje engleskog jezika? *

Abstract:

Kao globalna lingua franca, engleski jezik je danas osnovni i neophodni standard u svakodnevnoj komunikaciji. Nepoznavanje engleskog jezika može znatno otežati praćenje stručne literature, ostvarivanje međunarodne saradnje, prezentovanje naučnih radova i napredovanje u karijeri. Iz svih navedenih razloga, na svim fakultetima Univerziteta Singidunum engleski jezik je obavezan, dvosemestralni predmet tokom četiri godine osnovnih akademskih studija, kako na redovnim studijama, tako i na studijama na daljinu. Moodle platforma je osnovno sredstvo za učenje stranog jezika za DLS (distance learning system) studente. Ovaj rad se bavi analizom upotrebe Moodle platforme u nastavi engleskog jezika na Univerzitetu Singidunum i svim prednostima i manama koje platforma sadrži. Dat je osvrt na sve funkcije platforme kako za učenje vokabulara, tako i za usvajanje sve četiri jezičke veštine (slušanje, čitanje, pričanje, pisanje). Cilj rada je da ukaže na pozitivne i negativne aspekte Moodle platforme u nastavi engleskog jezika kako bi se elektronsko učenje moglo posmatrati i kao dopuna klasičnoj nastavi.

Key words:

Moodle,
učenje na daljinu,
engleski jezik.