PBL VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL PLATFORMS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The article presents an overview of various educational platforms for teaching a foreign language (English). The purpose of the article: to show the range of possibilities of different sites, each of which is designed for learning, but is aimed at different users. The sites analyzed in the article have a different methodological base and set themselves different specific learning goals. The practical experience of using the corporate educational platform in training is considered. Attention is paid to the difficulties of working with educational platforms of universities for teachers of foreign languages.

KEYWORDS: *PBL, Educational Platforms, Distance Learning, Teaching Foreign Languages.*

INTRODUCTION

The modern view on the process of learning a foreign language is the result of understanding the communicative functioning of a person in the environment, in the context of a group and society. This view of linguistic communication suggests that language is essentially incommunicable. Only products of communication activity are transferred. An ever deeper understanding of the correctness of the learning process, including the process of learning a foreign language, has led to a weakening of the connection between it and the learning process, relegating the latter to a more limited role and directing research interests to the student, and not to the teacher, as it was before. It is this focus on the one who studies a foreign language that has led to such a phenomenon as the struggle for a student of various schools offering foreign language teaching. According to the requirements of modern civilization in education, educational platforms have received one of the priority roles. However, it seems that after a period of enthusiasm for e-learning, it is time to think about the real possibilities of using the Internet in the didactic process of higher education.

Decisions about how to use online tools may vary, but they should be subject to the achievement of didactic goals and the quality of online learning. In the modern information world, saturated with various electronic resources, higher education institutions have to withstand fierce competition with various educational centers and platforms that provide opportunities for learning a foreign language.

In this article, we will compare several educational platforms in comparison: two non-institutional educational platforms and two university ones. Using their example, we will compare the approaches, opportunities and conditions for teaching a foreign language. Of course, the comparison of narrowly focused commercial projects and university platforms is not completely parity. However, this approach is due to an attempt to understand the expectations of modern students from electronic learning tools, to see the prospect of developing non-profit educational platforms and to ask the question: whether the educational platform of the university should imitate them or try to develop its own niche in education.

"Puzzle English is an online platform (website and mobile applications) for self-study of English. Develops the practice of listening comprehension, reading, writing and speaking... The Puzzle English website appeared in 2011 as an author's project by Alexander Antonov (originally learnonline.me) the number of users is 4 million." [One].

Various forms of training await the user on the site. First of all, there is an opportunity to pass a language proficiency test. Depending on the results, exercises of various levels will be offered. You can turn to short video lessons, in which there is a place for both grammar issues and problems in communicating with representatives of a foreign culture. There are games that contribute to the development of vocabulary and the assimilation of grammar. Conversation training, general communications are relatively recent developments of the site's authors.

For regular visits to the site and the implementation of the training program, the user receives bonuses and discounts for paid services. This helps to maintain the interest of the student and, often, his transition from free to paid users.

The exercise that became the basis of the name of the site - word puzzles, is widely used by the co-creators of the platform. The user is prompted to collect after the watched video phrases from the presented set of words, i.e. collect the puzzle. This exercise serves to develop listening skills (accompanies the videos you watch), helps to remember typical speech turns and grammatical constructions.

One unusual feature is that the user can comment on each sentence in the exercise. And at the same time get an answer from the same users, and from the teachers of this platform. Sometimes a comment thread grows into a full-fledged tree, and it raises difficult questions of grammar and ethics of communication in English.

A distinctive feature of the "Puzzle English" platform is not only focus on a motivated user capable of self-learning, but also generating the atmosphere of the game. This is facilitated by game forms of tasks, and the creation of "traveler's cards" for the smallest users. Perhaps it is precisely the gaming focus that allows this platform to successfully compete and find its user.

"Skyeng is an online school for learning English. Training is carried out on the Vimbox training platform, as well as using a mobile application, browser extensions and training mailings (skyeng.ru). The school was founded in 2012 by graduates of the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and Moscow State Technical University. Bauman Georgy Solovyov, KharitonMatveev, Denis Smetnev and Andrey Yaunz. … Now 60 thousand people study at Skyeng and more than 6300 teachers from all over the world work" [3].

Initially, the site positions itself as a "school" and the approach to learning is based on the teacher-student hierarchy. At the same time, the user can select a teacher and change him later if, for some reason, the previously selected teacher no longer satisfies the student. The learning platform provides many options for interaction with the school, in addition to paid lessons, which can be redeemed as a whole course, or starting with several of them.

Lessons are held online both with video broadcast and only with audio (at the student's choice). The student receives homework, which should be completed until the next lesson, or postponed until the moment when he has time for this. This possibility is provided, first of all, by the fact that most of the tasks are checked automatically at the time of execution, and the user immediately sees his mistake, can proceed to explain the grammar in this aspect, get a hint from the system. At the same time, there are tasks for listening and writing texts, which are checked by the teacher.

The school is attentive to tracking lessons, all teachers know that their lessons can be viewed by methodologists, that statistics are collected on the use of a foreign language in a lesson. Managers and specialists try to predict the user's behavior and remind him of other services of the school and

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its platform. This is an opportunity to participate in discussions with other students (both the teacher and the bot can lead them), as well as in conversations with native speakers. Such proposals are designed to develop direct communication skills and allow you to remove a possible psychological barrier in the use of a foreign language.

The site also has exercises for grammar, tests, distributed by levels, separately you can do exercises to develop skills. Some of these features remain available to the user even after the completion of the paid service. The user can always return and continue the lessons in the form that he is more interested in.

At the same time, the teacher is not limited to choosing only from those materials that he prepared personally. Methodists and technical specialists allow "not to reinvent the wheel" (create your own materials for each lesson and come up with exercises), but rely on the experience and skills of colleagues. The platform provides the opportunity to choose a topic, level, individual lessons, video, audio or grammar exercises for each student.

Thus, we can conclude not only about the large number of exercises on this platform, but also that the creators tried to build a strict methodological base, create a space that is convenient for both the teacher and the student.

The University of Granada (Granada, Spain) is one of the oldest European educational institutions (founded in 1531). The University's Center for Modern Languages (CLM) is widely known. Every year, approximately 8,000 foreign students come to Granada to study at the language courses of the Center for Modern Languages. Spanish is often just the first step towards getting an education at the University of Granada. However, not only those who want to learn Spanish turn to CLM, but also those who are interested in other European languages. But not everyone can afford to come to Granada and receive full-time education. Among those studying at CLM there are those who have never been not only in Granada, but also in Spain. How is this possible?

All CLM students get access to a virtual platform in their personal account. Depending on the chosen language course, the student sees individual tasks that need to be completed. In addition, teachers record and upload videos with educational lectures and materials. There is a virtual class. The student enters his personal account at the time indicated in the schedule, and then other course participants and the teacher are waiting for him. This is an opportunity to participate in an on-line lesson.

And, of course, there is also a group chat, which allows you to discuss classes with the teacher, with the same course participants. Such a multidisciplinary platform allows you to maximize the use of all student perception systems, activate his interest, and spur motivation. On the one hand, each student performs his tasks individually, but on the other hand, he has the opportunity to communicate with others and communicate in the language being studied.

CLM provides its students with Spanish courses and the opportunity to take a Spanish certification exam, including through a virtual platform in all basic skills: listening, reading, writing, speaking. Several teachers take part in such an exam and use all the technical capabilities of the platform, as well as Skype.

The educational portal is a network educational platform of the GrSU. YankaKupala [4]. The digital services developed by the university staff will allow organizing full-fledged training. For example, teachers will be able to track whether students are attending online classes, see their activity on the educational portal, and evaluate the work done by students. It is also possible to conduct remote consultations.

It should be noted that in the spring of the 2019/2020 academic year (due to the forced transition to distance learning), university teachers actively used not only the capabilities of the educational

portal, but also turned to other educational platforms and Internet services. Among them, we should single out those that made it possible to conduct classes in the mode of instant messengers, chats and video conferences. It is these functions that were not provided by the creators of the GrSU educational portal, since such tasks were not previously set for this platform.

In the case of the implementation of the didactic process via the Internet, communication between the teacher and the student takes place using asynchronous communication tools (e-mail, discussion forum) or synchronous communication tools (text - chat, voice - Internet telephony). Due to the fact that participation in synchronous communication requires simultaneous access to the computers of both the teacher and the student, asynchronous communication is used much more often, which has certain psychological consequences for its participants.

The main issues that would have to be considered before starting work on a specialized platform for teaching a foreign language (including Russian as a foreign language) within the framework of the university program are didactic and technical ones, such as the organization of the educational process, teacher-student communication, teaching materials, skills of teachers and students in the use of new technologies. And these difficulties are noted by all teachers who turn to the practice of distance learning: "Distance learning puts forward new requirements for educational materials: the presence of video content, moreover, in the format of short thematic videos, modular division of the course, testing for passing each module, the availability of network means of interaction both with other students and teacher (forums, etc.)" [5, p. 28].

Teachers who are faced with the need to create their own materials for teaching a foreign language also note such problems as the large time spent on developing the course, in the case of creating an EEMCD (electronic educational and methodological complex) - the impossibility of modifying the developed course (written on CDs), insufficient computer literacy to create your own programs for exercises and automatic processing of results, difficulties in interacting with programmers-developers (which is sometimes associated with the usual misunderstanding and different vision of the problem) .

It is interesting that quite often among the shortcomings of distance e-learning at a university are called "lack of student motivation" and the fact that "during distance learning, personal communication with the teacher is generally not provided. However, the development of communication channels makes it possible to partially offset this disadvantage through the use of videoconferencing and e-mail" [2].

As noted by Uzbek researchers, there are other problems: "... it is necessary to regulate such issues as rationing the workload and remuneration of teachers who lead disciplines in this form, rationing the payment of technical staff who ensure the creation of MOOC courses, working out a standard agreements with the author-developer of the course, settlement of issues of remote certification, the use of proctoring" [5, p. 28].

When planning the didactic process, one should be aware of the advantages of educational platforms and their disadvantages. Educational platforms and the individual tools available on them have many features. The reality represented by the use of educational platforms in the didactic process can be very diverse depending on the quantity and quality of the tools used and the organizational model adopted.

What is the main difference between platforms? Of course, this is accessibility, the ability to choose a teacher, the form of classes, types of exercises, various consequences of consent or refusal to study, a different degree of user independence. And another important circumstance: the motivation of the student. The student does not feel that he is doing it for himself or for fun. A person who has chosen free features on a commercial site positions himself, firstly, as someone who has fun with these exercises in his spare time and, secondly, feels that he gets what he needs

for free (and you must admit: It's nice to get something for free that you would be charged for elsewhere). The user of paid content seeks to justify the costs and draw the maximum out of the available opportunities. Such a person understands that he pays for the service provided and can influence the learning process to a certain extent.

The question that may arise after the comparison of online platforms is: should not all projects be made more commercialized, aimed at profit? After all, many problems will be solved this way. As much as you would like, but - "no." A higher education institution does not set itself the goal of making money on a product that is its platform. Here it is important to enable the teacher and the student to organize the educational process, the student to master the material required by the program, the teacher to evaluate the student's knowledge. Of course, maintaining interest in learning, introducing new forms, including expanding opportunities, is the future of educational platforms. Much can be realized by foreign language teachers in cooperation with computer scientists. For this, the desire and didactic, technical, and legal capabilities are necessary. And then, perhaps, a student, instead of the sacramental: "I learned a foreign language at a university," will be able to say: "I learned a foreign language at a university."

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