

Necessity of Distance Learning Implementation in Terms of the Worldwide Pandemia: Modern Reality of Ukrainian Universities and the Example of the Discipline “Foreign Language” of Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University

L. Veremiuk, L. Polishchuk, I. Liubchenko, I. Boichevska, A. Ivanchuk, I. Nesterenko

Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University,
2 Sadova str., Uman, Ukraine

ABSTRACT

The article deals with online platforms through which blended learning takes place at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University on the example of the discipline “Foreign Language” taught to students of the speciality Tourism and Hotel and Restaurant Business. The mechanism of e-learning courses creating in the Moodle information environment system has been analyzed. The advantages of the platform are indicated, in particular free access, ease of use, a large number of activities that increase the motivation and interest of students. At the same time, the difficulties of work in the

Moodle information environment system for both students and teachers are highlighted. It is determined that technical and computer training of both teachers and students is important to achieve high positive results. It is recommended to conduct pieces of training and seminars to improve the professional level of foreign language teachers who administer Moodle courses and students who use them.

Keywords: Distance Education, Distance Learning Platform, Online Service, Online Application, Synchronous Learning, Asynchronous Learning, E-learning Course, Virtual Learning Environment

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, distance learning was not widely used in Ukraine, which can be explained by the insufficient level of development and dissemination of information and communication technologies. But today in our country there are technical prerequisites for the introduction and widespread use of distance learning, and Internet resources are becoming increasingly popular among young people because their advantages include easy accessibility, they are free and easy to use. Besides, nowadays the world has faced a global problem - pandemia of coronavirus. It influenced all spheres of social life, from employment to entertainment. It has also changed the way of educational services, turning face to face education into the virtual one. Therefore, there is an issue of distance learning use in Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEI).

There is no doubt that Ukraine is ready for complete use of distance learning, as it already existed as an additional form of education and the students and lecturers used it from time to time. For example, at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University the system of distance learning, Moodle, was provided about 5 years ago, in 2015. In recent years, it has undergone several transformations. Moreover, under quarantine, teachers must continue their work, especially outside the classroom. To ensure effective learning, they need effective and useful distance learning tools. This situation proves the relevance of the use of distance learning tools, because with their help teachers can successfully continue to conduct training in quarantine with the help of Moodle. The structure of the system allows students to get access to practical lessons as well as to lectures, presentations and videos. Moreover, students can do tasks and tests, and attach them for evaluation.

ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

The scientists Harashima, Robb, Brandl, Su, Cole and Foster, Yamada devoted their work to the study of the main characteristics of Moodle. Miyazoe made a comparative analysis of various mixed courses at the universities of Tokyo. Al-Jarf compared the effectiveness of WebCT, Moodle and Nicenet for learning English as a foreign language. Britto has developed a guide for first-year students at Sofia University; Baskerville and Robb have successfully implemented this platform at Kyoto Sangio University with a focus on writing. Kennedy studied the advantages of Moodle platform comparing with other commercial resources. Among domestic scientists, the prospects of distance education and the problems of using the latest information technologies are considered by V. Datsiuk, I. Bulakh, R. Gurevych, T. Kashytsyn, V. Romaniuk, T. Yashchur and

others. In general, more and more scholars are interested in the described platform, because it meets the traditional requirements of pedagogy and modern trends of English teaching methods.

The purpose of the article is to analyze Moodle distance learning platform, to present its features, advantages and disadvantages.

PECULIARITIES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance education is an open learning form and serves those who cannot attend courses or programs full-time for one reason or another. In other words, they take responsibility for their learning, that is, independence is important. The method of distance education implementation can be divided into two categories of synchronous and asynchronous learning, while each category has its advantages. In simultaneous language learning, all participants are simultaneously connected through a common network though it may not be in one place. For example, this approach can be applied in practice through video conferencing and direct learning programs online and on air. Moreover, it provides a real feeling of being inside the classroom, as each participant can dynamically participate in the learning process.

Asynchronous learning, on the other hand, offers the opportunity to benefit in the classroom at any time, regardless of time constraints. A great example is video blogging, where students can download recorded material and use it at a time convenient to them. Students can listen to or watch the professor's lectures as much as needed. This offers solutions to potential problems, as students can review problem areas as needed (Distance learning for schoolchildren, Moodle as a Supporting VLE in ESL Secondary Education). This type of learning also has its advantages. Schedule flexibility and consistency in practice are among them.

There is also the third way of learning, which is defined as blended learning». It is a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning and offers the benefits of both traditional campus-based classes and distance learning. According to L. Kushmar and L. Kolot, three main components function in a constant relationship in the model of blended learning of the modern educational environment. They are face-to-face learning, which has a traditional format (teacher-student), self-study learning (provides independent work of students), online collaborative learning (work of students and teachers online) (Kushmar, Kolot, 2019).

In this article, we would like to look into online platforms which are used for blended learning at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University on the example of the discipline "Foreign Language" for students majoring in Tourism, Hotel and Restaurant Business. One of such platforms is Moodle, which is the modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment, which is used not only in the process of organizing distance learning but also to support the traditional educational process in HEI. First of all, it is worth considering the invention and the concept of this system. Moodle is a training course that has a system of interconnected pages that can be moved via hyperlinks. This learning environment is also called a learning management system (LMS), a course management system (CMS), a virtual learning environment (VLE) or simply a learning platform that provides teachers, students and administrators with a highly developed set of tools for computer-based learning, including distance learning.

There are now more than 68,000 registered Moodle sites in 235 countries (both Eastern (such as China, Taiwan) and Western (Australia, America, the United Kingdom,

and others)), 28 million users, and 2.5 million courses. Among the most famous users of this platform, there are the London School of Economics, New York State University, the Open University of Great Britain and the giant Microsoft companies (Bakhmat, Babakina, 2014).

USE OF MOODLE PLATFORM IN THE DISCIPLINE “FOREIGN LANGUAGE” AT PAVLO TYCHYNA UMAN STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Distance teaching of the discipline “Foreign Language” at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University has opened up new opportunities for working with students through Moodle platform. Thus, several advantages have been found out. The first of them is flexibility - the teacher can independently create an author’s distance course and manage it (State University of Telecommunications). The second advantage is the ease of download - users can use Moodle without downloading additional software. The next advantage is a wide range of didactic materials, as Moodle system provides convenient content management tools, such as lectures, practical tasks, forums, chat, etc. One can use text, presentations, tables, diagrams, graphics, videos, links on the Internet and more. The set of means of communication provided by the system allows providing individual work of the teacher with each student. This includes not only e-mail and file sharing, but also forums, chats, blogging (State University of Telecommunications). Because of the general accessibility and individuality of students, using the Internet can access e-learning resources from different places (workplace, classroom, home, etc.). Moreover, Moodle environment is reliable in operation; it is easy to use and administer; it ensures information security (setting passwords, processing data forms, storing information in a database) and data transfer from teacher to student; it also evaluates students’ academic achievements; contains more than twenty types of resources and software (Koval, 2013). There is also a convenient evaluation system. Knowledge control is carried out in Moodle through a separate module that offers many types of tests. An important feature of Moodle is that the system creates and stores a portfolio of each student, which can store all the work submitted by the student, all grades and comments of the teacher to the work, all messages in the forum (Koval, 2013).

Researcher L. Maksimova includes the following as the main didactic advantages of the system: expanding students’ access to educational resources; providing active learning; availability of means of communication of subjects of study (exchange of files of any formats, mailings, forum, chat, the possibility of commenting on work of students, personal correspondence, etc.); providing an individual choice of a convenient time for study; ensuring the objectivity of the process of evaluating learning outcomes) (Maksimova, 2015).

The system has also positive opportunities for the teacher: a tool for developing an author’s course; use of files in * .doc, * .pdf, * HTML formats; placement of audio and video materials; quick modification of educational materials (change, expansion, addition and adjustment); the ability to automatically generate tests and use their different types; automation of knowledge testing, reports, tests; support for work with mathematical formulas; adding various elements of the course; setting the required deadlines (Moodle as a Supporting VLE in ESL Secondary Education).

It should be noted that there are several formats for creating e-learning courses in the Moodle information environment, among them there are the following: Calendar format or weekly format, where training on the course and structuring of training material takes place weekly; format-structure or thematic, the structuring of which (educational material and training on the course) is organized by modules, topics, sections, defined by the course program (it is considered to be one of the most acceptable formats in the organization of distance learning for students (Bakhmat, Babakina, 2014)); forum format, where the training course is organized with the help of one large forum.

In the Moodle system, the lecturers of Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University use both thematic and calendar structuring of the course. At thematic structuring, the course is divided into sections on subjects. With calendar structuring, each week of studying the course is a separate section. Such structuring is convenient at the distance organization of training and gives the chance to students to plan correctly the educational work (Trius, Gerasimenko, Franchuk, 2013).

The e-learning course of the discipline “Foreign language” contains different materials: texts and graphics, video and audio materials, exercises, workshops, laboratory works. The course has the following general structure: general information about the course: news of the course; the purpose and tasks of the course; academic course working program; individual teaching and research tasks; tasks for self-study; forms of control and criteria for evaluating the students’ educational activities; the list of printed and other information resources from the course; course glossary (fig.1).

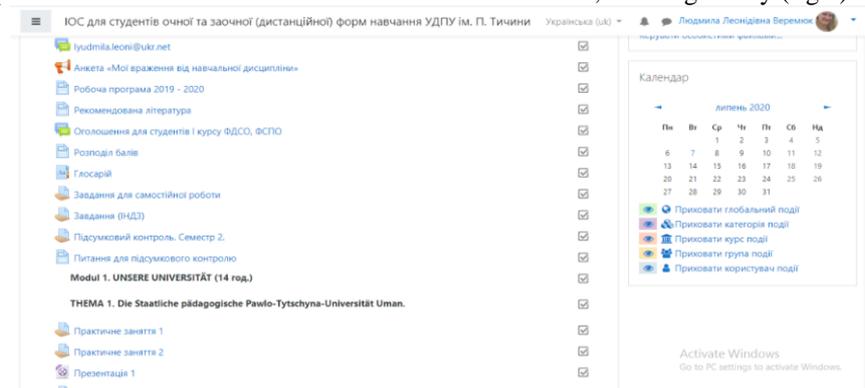


Fig. 1. Contents of the course “Foreign language (German)”

The course content editing is done by the course author in any order and also can be easily done directly in the learning process. It is quite easy to add various elements to the e-course: Lecture, Tasks, Forum, Glossary, Wiki, Chat, etc. There is a convenient view page for the latest changes for each e-course. Thus, the Moodle system provides the university teacher with tools for presenting course materials, conducting theoretical and practical classes, organizing individual and group learning activities of students (Bezlyudnyy, Bezlyudna, Shcherban’, Komar, 2019).

Moodle has a multifunctional module for testing, provides an opportunity to assess the work of students, moreover the assessment can be carried out on scales created by the university teacher. All grades can be viewed in grade book, which has many settings for displaying and grouping grades.

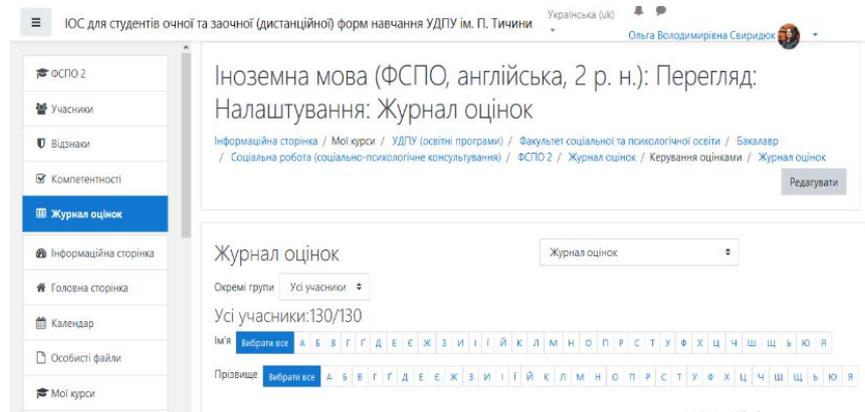


Fig.2. Gradebook “Foreign language (English)”

The main focus of Moodle courses at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University is the practice of effective interaction. Students can listen to audio recordings, watch videos, answer questions, expand their vocabulary, participate in quizzes that cover grammar, intercultural and lexical topics, write to other students and teachers on forums or online chats. Some researchers used Moodle platform in Oman identified five positive characteristics: improving student-student and teacher-student interaction, finding interlocutors, assisting students in the implementation of research projects, promoting student independence, changing routines. However, they also noted the following problems: a small number of active students; low computer awareness; technical problems (Zabolotna, Gut, 2018). However, the students of Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University are enthusiastic about the use of computer technology in education: 71 per cent of respondents, who took part in the questionnaire, were satisfied with Moodle platform and its features. As a rule, 95-97 per cent of students regularly attended classes and praised blended learning with individual and group assignments; especially they liked working on projects as a part of the team. The students themselves noted an improvement in general English language skills, highlighting the skills of listening, speaking and demonstrating projects. After completing his first year using Moodle platform in the United Arab Emirates, Ismail Fayed concluded that the percentage of students who passed the English exam increased significantly (Moodle as a Supporting VLE in ESL Secondary Education). Students who were unable to attend classes in the classroom can view the missed material with the help of Moodle courses (Barnawi).

However, difficulties should be noted too. About 10 per cent consider the platform incomprehensible to use, and 71 per cent of respondents think that tests and questionnaires are very complex. When using Moodle platform, it is recommended to take a test of general computer awareness of students and, if necessary, advise courses for improving computer skills. Considering the innovative technologies of using Moodle platform, it is important to note that the main problem is their effective and correct application, and the work of the university teacher is a key component. Several scientists note that the basis of successful use of innovative technologies for learning English is the human factor because Moodle platform itself does not stimulate teaching or learning, its effectiveness lies in the active and interactive participation of teachers and students (Nozawa). Thus, Baylor and Ritchie determine that regardless of the degree of accessibility and simplicity of a particular technology use, educators need additional

training to maximize learning opportunities (Barnawi). That is why it is advisable to hold seminars on Moodle from a technical and pedagogical point of view.

CONCLUSION

Due to the use of innovative technologies in the study of a foreign language at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University learning becomes more student-oriented and time-efficient. Virtual learning environment maximizes interaction and cooperation, interest in learning and receiving new information. Using Moodle platform for teaching a foreign language, teachers from Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University create an environment for lifelong learning with unlimited control, editing, archiving, viewing, etc., and the most importantly – for close interaction between students and teachers. At the same time, technical and computer training of teachers and students is important for fruitful work and achievement of the set results.

REFERENCES

- Distance learning for schoolchildren: <http://www.ime.edu.ua/net/em.html> (in Ukrainian).
- Kushmar, L., Kolot, L. (2019). Myenglishlab as one of the innovative blended learning platforms. Bulletin of Karazin KhNU. Series: Foreign Philology. Methods of teaching foreign languages (in Ukrainian).
- Bakhmat, L.V., Babakina, O.O. (2014). Using the Moodle platform to learn English. Scientific notes of the Department of Pedagogy, vol. XXXVII, pp. 43-50 (2014) (in Ukrainian).
- State University of Telecommunications: <http://www.dut.edu.ua/ua/1035-pro-sistemumoodle-organizaciyno-metodichniy-centr-novitnih-tehnologiy-navchannya> (in Ukrainian).
- Koval, T. (2013). The features of designing informative and educational multicultural environment of the Pedagogical University. In: International scientific-practical conference Ukraine and the World: Dialogue of Languages and Cultures. Publishing center, KNLU, Odessa (in Ukrainian).
- Maksimova, L.P. (2015). Organizational and pedagogical principles of ensuring the quality of future economists professional training by means of information and communication technologies. In: Theory and methods of professional education, Kremenchuk (in Ukrainian).
- Moodle as a Supporting VLE in ESL Secondary Education: <http://elexforum.hbmeu.ac.ae/Moodle.pdf.2>
- Trius, Y., Gerasimenko, I., Franchuk V.M. (2013). Universities e-learning system based on MOODLE. CSTU, Cherkasy (in Ukrainian).
- Bezlyudnyy, O.I., Bezlyudna, V.V., Shcherban', I.Yu., Komar, O.C. (2019). Dosvid vykorystannya tekhnolohiyi zmishanoho navchannya na zanyattyakh z anhliys'koyi movy u zakladakh vyshchoyi pedahohichnoyi osvity [Experience in using blended learning technology in English classes in institutions of higher pedagogical education. Information technologies and learning tools], Information technologies and learning tools. Vol.73. № 5. pp. 86-100 (in Ukrainian).
- Zabolotna, O., Gut, N. (2018). Learning the language of instruction in Ukraine: international students' attitudes. *Advanced Education*, 10, pp. 48-54. DOI: 10.20535/2410-8286.143742.
- Barnawi, O. Use Your Noodle to Learn Moodle: http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Dec_09/article05.htm.
- Nozawa, K. To Moodle or not to Moodle: Can It Be an Ideal e-Learning Environment?: http://www.ps.ritsumei.ac.jp/assoc/policy_science/183/183_19_nozawa.pdf.