Blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT

The approaches to defining and realising blended learning have been discussed in the paper. The author's experience in conducting blended learning for the future philologists at National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" has been described. The devised blended learning model implied the use of the video conferencing platform Zoom to ensure face-to-face communication and the use of the learning management system Canvas for the online training. Blended classes *via* Zoom were held by the curriculum according to the schedule. During the classes students performed tasks on audio/video comprehension with further semantic, lexical, grammatical analysis and discussion of the content; trained the usage of new lexical units through interactive learning; participated in frontal discussions, reported on the results of the pair/ group discussions held in chat rooms, prepared and presented the results of their own research, discussed the tasks performed in Canvas, etc. Online training was organised in the learning management system Canvas which is characterised by high functionality and flexibility. Canvas allows users to create and customise their own learning environment based on their individual needs; provides possibility of continuous interaction with the lecturer; demonstrates compatibility with mobile devices and operating systems; available to the participants of the education process 24/7 and can be used from any place at any time. Working with Canvas, students performed tasks to improve lexical and grammatical skills, develop academic writing and listening skills; solved problem-based tasks, created and uploaded their own audio and video recordings presenting the results, etc. A survey was conducted among the participants of the education process: positive attitude toward the suggested blended learning model was revealed.

Introduction

In the past decade, due to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, the concept of blended learning has become an extremely popular education modality, with educators and learners worldwide accepting its effectiveness and high potential. 'Blended learning not only fits into modern, connected lifestyle, but can also provide specific benefits to students, teachers, and administration…' (Stein and Graham, 2014, p. 14).

It is universally recognised that blended learning (or hybrid learning) offers increased access and convenience, flexibility, improved instructional design, ensures personalisation/individualisation of the learning process, increases engagement through social interaction, and develops the proactive approach to the studying with the teacher being a facilitator of the process.

Background

Different aspects of blended learning have been studied in the works of prominent scholars: C.J. Bonk, T.M. Olson, R.A. Wisher, K.L. Orvis (2002), J. Bersin (2004), E. Allen, J. Seaman, R. Garrett (2007), D.R. Garrison, N. Vaughan (2007), S. Jared, C.R. Graham (2014), L.P. Dringus, A.B. Seagull (2015), C. Dziuban, C.R. Graham, P.D. Moskal (2018), N. Dotsenko (2020) and others.

However, at present there is no unanimously accepted definition of blended learning and approaches to realising blended learning and creating blended models are context-dependent. 'The way in which blended learning is delivered is usually dependent on circumstances, making a universal, all-encompassing definition hard to establish' (Quigley, 2019).

Classically, blended learning is viewed as a kind of relic symbolic of the gap between traditional education and connected and digital learning (Teach Thought Staff, 2020) and is defined as an approach that 'combines the best of two training environments – structured environment that includes face-to-face interaction with an instructor, and semi-autonomous, computer-based training' (ELM Learning, 2021); 'a method of teaching that integrates technology and digital media with traditional instructor-led classroom activities, giving students more flexibility to customise their learning experiences' (Panopto, 2019).

Some scholars interpret blended learning as an approach when students have an opportunity to visit onsite sessions if they feel the necessity. Educators are to

create a fully online course with optional onsite components that can substitute for online activities:

> In a blended-learning course, for example, students might attend a class taught by a teacher in a traditional classroom setting, while also independently completing online components of the course outside of the classroom. In this case, in-class time may be either replaced or supplemented by online learning experiences, and students would learn about the same topics online as they do in class - i.e., the online and in-person learning experiences would parallel and complement one another (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

According to another approach to organising blended learning (Quigley, 2019), the 'place-based classroom methods' can be replaced by webinars, making the learning even more accessible and convenient. Nowadays, there are a number of webinar tool options available, among them Zoom, GoToWebinar, Cisco WebEx, Adobe Connect, Google Hangouts, AnyMeeting. The latter approach was adopted while organising blended learning in the COVID-19 pandemic for future philologists at National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" (autumn and fall semesters, 2020-2021).

Study methods

During the research theoretical and empirical methods were used. Theoretical methods included analysis, synthesis and systematisation of the psychological, linguistic and methodological works; empirical methods included pedagogical observation, conducting a survey using Google Forms to identify the students' attitude to the suggested blended model.

Findings

The suggested blended model implied the usage of the video conferencing platform Zoom to hold face-to-face practical classes and the learning management system Canvas to organise and realise students' online learning (Vashchylo, 2022).

Face-to-face classes *via* Zoom were held by the curriculum according to the schedule. During the classes students performed tasks on audio/video comprehension with further semantic, lexical, grammatical analysis and discussion of the content; trained the usage of new lexical units through interactive learn-

ing; participated in frontal discussions, reported on the results of the pair/ group discussions held in chat rooms, prepared and presented the results of their own research, discussed the tasks they performed in Canvas with the lecturer and groupmates, etc. (Vashchylo, 2022).

Students' online learning was organised in the learning management system (LMS) Canvas. This particular system was chosen due to the author's positive experience in organising students' out-of-class individual work within the methodology of teaching English monologue production to future mechanical engineers through podcasting (Vashchylo, 2020). The use of LMS Canvas in the suggested blended model was also predetermined by its high functionality and flexibility. The system in question allows users to create and customise their own learning environment based on their individual needs; provide the possibility of continuous interaction with the lecturer. Being compatible with a number of mobile devices and operating systems (iPad, iPhone, Android, etc.), LMS Canvas is available to students 24/7 and can be used from any place at any time. The system has a user-friendly interface and is easy to work with. The educational content in Canvas can be easily arranged into units and modules, the submission deadline is set, the number of attempts and peculiarities of the assessment are indicated. The tasks performed by students are accumulated in the system and are available to the lecturer and students when needed (Vashchylo, 2022).

Working in LMS Canvas during their online learning sessions, students performed various tasks: practised the usage of specialised terminological units and grammar structures; conducted semantic analysis of the comprehended information; summarised the comprehended information, providing their personal comments on the topic, recorded and uploaded their own audio; solved problems connected with their major and discussed the results in pairs, minigroups, groups, created and uploaded their own video recordings as a result, etc. (Vashchylo, 2022).

Conclusions and directions for further research

In order to establish the students' attitudes toward the blended model a survey was conducted using Google Forms. The results of the survey revealed a positive attitude to organising the learning through video conferencing platform Zoom and the learning management system Canvas: 60% of the respondents were quite satisfied, 36% of the respondents were "absolutely satisfied".

The prospects for further research include: developing and implementing the blended course with the use of learning management systems for teaching English to future philologists at National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute", as well as checking its efficiency in the methodological experiment.

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