



## The On-Line English I Course through the Eminus Platform

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### Abstract

*The growing demand for technology based learning has led all kinds of institutions to develop their own educative platforms. The University of Veracruz (Universidad Veracruzana), which is the biggest public university in the state of Veracruz in Mexico, developed an educative platform to administrate different flexible learning environments in order to provide students and teachers the opportunity to explore an asynchrony teaching-learning process. This platform is called EMINUS and it's the home for the on-line courses of English. This paper presents a brief description on the English I on-line course through the Eminus platform which was specially designed for our university students. This course is the first of two English courses that are mandatory for all the educative programs. It explains how the Eminus platform was implemented in the University, how teachers have been trained to use it, the way the English on line courses started, how this course has evolved through the years, the way it is designed nowadays, and how this course is managed by teachers and students since they sign in into the course, until they present their final exams.*

### 1. Introduction

Because of the technological revolution around the world, most educative institutions have adopted a technology-based learning to respond to the necessities of our modern society and provide new opportunities and spaces for education.

All it started with distance education, where “teachers and students are in different places for all or most of the time that they teach and learn, depending on some form of communication technology” [1].

The history context of distance education has been divided by Moore and Kearsley in five generations:

- First generation: Correspondence study.
- Second Generation: Broadcasting.
- Third generation: The Open University.
- Fourth Generation: Teleconferencing.
- Fifth Generation: Computer and internet-based virtual classes.

In the fifth generation, the educational process of learning over the Internet without having face-to-face contact is known as virtual or online learning [2]. It is also called Web Based Instruction (WBI), which is defined by Khan as a hypermedia-based instructional program that utilizes the attributes and resources of the World Wide Web to create a meaningful learning environment where learning is fostered and supported [3].

Nowadays, most institutions of higher education have implemented this learning environment as a medium to facilitate education to those students who are not able to attend a face-to-face class. The University of Veracruz (Universidad Veracruzana), as an important public university in Mexico, started implementing this type of learning through a commercial learning management system called “WebCT”, but it was too expensive because of the number of users required in it. The University also tried using free or open sources, but they were too complicated to use and lacked of important tools such as multimedia or videoconference system [4]. For this reason, The University of Veracruz developed its own educative platform: The system of distributed education called “Eminus”.

### 2. The Eminus platform

Eminus is a system that administrates flexible learning environments which allows the presentation of online courses in order to broaden the education coverage at the University of Veracruz (UV). It is supported by the use of collaboration and multimedia tools for synchronous and asynchronous communication.

Eminus was developed by experts from the UV General Management of Information Technologies. Its main purpose consists of supporting the teaching-learning process and the implementation of new educational paradigms.

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Eminus also expands coverage and promotes the improvement of educational quality through the incorporation of new processes and materials. It also offers a reliable variety of educational resources for teachers and students as the system guarantees the protection of the information managed by all users. Besides, it is very easy to create, administrate and publish a course in the platform with additional materials such as videos, slides and spreadsheets, to which students can access from all around the world.

The system provides students with different tools they can use for a better performance such as: calculator, personal agenda (events), internal messages, forums, chat rooms, collaborative spaces and virtual classrooms [5].

## 2.1 Eminus model

Colunga (2007) describes the components and principal basis of the Eminus philosophy in figure 1:

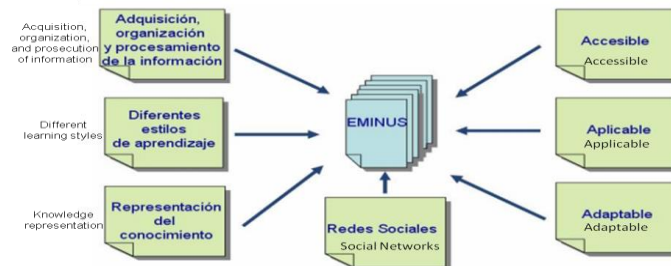


Figure 1. Eminus model by Colunga (2007).

This model is based on the processing of information, learning styles, knowledge representation, and social networks, with the purpose of creating a more accessible, applicable and adaptable system.

## 2.2 Eminus characteristics

Eminus has a variety of advanced technologies for collaborative work online as well as different communication, collaboration and administration characteristics. Colunga (2007) lists some of the most important:

- Learning tools such as: content viewer and learning objects, content management, evaluation modules.
- Communication tools such as: forums, chats, virtual classroom, and videoconference for synchronous and asynchronous communication. The platform also has a “help center”.

## 3. Teacher training for Eminus

Since Eminus was implemented, a number of training courses in the use of this platform has been imparted to help teachers start working with it. Most of them started working with Eminus as an aid for their face to face classes. The first training courses included subjects as: users profile, contact with users, online contents, activities, evaluations, discussions forums, videoconferences, E-mail, among others. As the platform has been evolved though the years, the training courses include now the next topics: timeline, students monitoring, how to create a course, how to upload videos, how to hyperlink files, among others. Students and teachers can access to the Eminus manuals any time they need at:

<https://eminus.uv.mx/eminus/Manuales.aspx>



Figure 2. Teacher training for Eminus



## 4. English E-learning through Eminus

In mid-2008, a group of teachers from the UV language Centers, with virtual tutoring experience, gather for the first time to work in the design and elaboration of learning materials for English on line courses coordinated by outstanding staff from the university's Self-Access Centers. At first, work began with the syllabus for basic levels using the Office "Word" format in most materials. Once these materials were carefully revised and approved, they were uploaded to the Eminus platform to offer the first on line English courses at the University.

After we started our experience as on line tutors, we continue to work hard in the improvement and update of the courses by adding audio materials and power point presentations, as well as a series of internet links to help students reinforce their training on English.

In the same way, we have worked to improve the students' participation in the discussion forums, in order to accomplish a better interaction and exchange of experiences among them. The evaluation criteria have also required long work sessions to define the proper percentage for each of its rubrics. They include the evaluation of a final project focused in the "task based" approach.

It is noteworthy that the academic work that has been carried out to offer on line courses provides just a starting point on which tutors can base their work because they are free to implement different strategies to improve the quality of the courses [6].

## 5. The Online English 1 course

The online English 1 course is the first of two English courses that are mandatory for all the educative programs at the University. Once students enrol in this course, their virtual tutors join them to the platform and invite them to attend an induction course where they learn how to work online. In this orientation session, tutors explain that everything is done online and that they just attend to the language centre for their mid-term and final tests.

Students will start studying the course contents which are divided in ten units. After studying the contents of each unit, they have to do the practice activities that consist of interactive consolidation exercises with an answer key to help them self-evaluate their progress. If students find difficult to comprehend the contents or exercises, they must contact their virtual tutors through an E-mail message in order to set a counselling session online (by E-mail or through the virtual classroom). Then, they have to participate in the forum of each unit and upload their tasks. The online tutor only evaluates the participations in forums and the tasks for each unit.

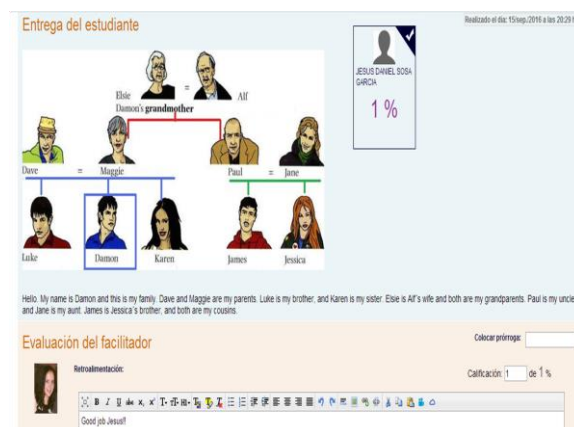


Figure 3. Student's task uploaded in the platform.

The tutor also has to keep close track of their students' performance and send constant messages to the ones who are delayed. After two months the course started, students should have finished five units and present their mid-term test in- person. Then, they continue working on the last five units. About one month before their final test, the tutor send the guidelines to elaborate their final project, which usually consist of a power point presentation where they describe a famous person, integrating all the subjects of the course and using images and voice recordings. They have to send their projects attached to an E-mail message one week before their final exam. After four months, students should have completed their ten units and be ready for their final exams. The evaluation criteria are as follows:

Table 1. Evaluation criteria for the English 1 course

EVALUATION CRITERIA		
EVIDENCE	CRITERIA	%
Forums participation	Depth of Analysis and discussion, fulfillment, sufficiency, relevance, coherence, information management.	5
Tasks	Grammar, vocabulary, communication and domain management, fulfillment on deadline.	20
Final project	Clearness, relevance, coherence and language management.	5
Partial examinations	Coherence, cohesion, clearness, grammar, vocabulary, information management and sufficiency.	10
Final oral exam	Communication and domain.	20
Final Written exam	Coherence, cohesion, clearness, grammar, vocabulary, information management and sufficiency.	40

## 5. Conclusions

The implementation of the Eminus platform represents a step ahead for the University of Veracruz due to the operation of new educational paradigms through its components and characteristics, which have reduced expenses and have provided different learning spaces for all the educative programs. One important aspect about the Eminus platform is the fact that it was created by technicians from the University who have been improving it according to our teachers and students experience and necessities.

The online English 1 course through the Eminus platform, which was first offered in 2008, has also evolved and improved. It has helped a selected group of students to work at their own pace and learn the language in a different learning style. Even though the online learning process might lack of some oral practice, most students are able to continue with their second mandatory English course.

The online learning process definitely needs more improvement and it is also necessary more spaces to share tutors and students experiences as well as more research about its effectiveness in the language acquisition and terminal efficiency.

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