

Blended Learning in Russia in Teaching Foreign Languages

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Abstract

Traditional educational system is slowly adapted to fast technological changes in the contemporary information society. Teaching approaches and content are needed for constant refreshment and modernization in order to be able to prepare "new generation engineers" capable to take responsibilities in decision making, to apply critical thinking and creative approaches to work that implies to be strongly committed to self-development and lifelong learning.

Apart these skills, the crucial competence of engineers (here we will call them nonlinguistic students) is the ability to use at least one foreign language, traditionally it is English, as a tool for professional communication in the national and international labour markets.

In spite of understanding of the language importance, Russia has weak outcomes in the form of graduates who are not able to integrate into international projects due to the low level of their English. This problem can be explained by some inconsistencies of existing language education system in Russia. First, it is the lack of continuity in language teaching of schools and universities; second, it is the lower mobility of Russia in comparison with Europe; and third, it is decreasing number of learning hours for language tuition.

To minimize these inconsistencies that back up the development, the language education system needs to be intensified by means of strengthening self-learning of students. Self-learning, in its turn, can not exist independently; it should be organized and methodically supported by tutors. In this term information technologies that provide online interactive teaching in combination with traditional class-learning methods can play a significant role.

This method is called blended learning but its concept is not yet homogeneous. Also common understanding is not achieved in defining the proportion of contact hours and hours under computer-mediated instructions in e-learning environment.

The article addresses the practices of Russian language teachers in applying the method of blended learning in teaching English to nonlinguistic students. The experiment implies using the MOODLE platform that allows to download different-purposed materials including animation and authentic texts for listening and reading and to organize an individual learning trajectory of students monitored constantly by tutors.

The developers studied thoroughly the teaching possibilities of MOODLE; designed the matrix of learning needs and system potential; created e-courses integrated into the traditional English course that covers such teaching necessities as accessibility, flexibility, high contextual relevance, combination of speech activities, individual mode, monitoring of students' activeness and problems.

The e-courses are on the elective base and oriented to debate skills development, grammar skills improvement, and argumentative writing skills development. The courses were implemented in real academic conditions; the article represents the results of it and students' survey as well.