Blended Learning in Research Methodology Module in Tallinn Health Care College

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Abstract

Modern approach to teaching requires the lecturer to be able to integrate technology, pedagogy and content (Dudeney et al. 2013). By the mid-1990s globalization started placing greater linguistic demands on education. Integrated learning is increasingly viewed as a modern form of educational delivery designed to even better equip the learner with knowledge and skills suitable for the global age. (Mehisto et al. 2010).

In Tallinn Health Care College, students of the Nursing Curriculum graduate by writing and defending their final thesis. Research Methodology is a module that has been created to teach students to use evidence-based information in developing one's profession, to develop knowledge about aims and principles of research in nursing science and about theoretical and practical skills in writing a research paper.

Blended learning tools offer learners the possibility to choose the time and the place to study; in essence, it is combining face-to-face learning with technology-based studies. In the Research Module grammar exercises are accessible online; to develop lexis, various broadcasts, thematic videos from Youtube, etc. are used. Online databases (Ebsco, BioMed Central, etc.) are used to write academic reports and to compile presentations. To explore keywords, online professional dictionaries are time-saving and effective components by helping to gain deeper knowledge of words. The module is passed when students present their report and get positive feedback from speciality and language lecturers.

Introduction

The aim of the article is to introduce the usage of blended learning and CLIL in Research Methodology Module in Tallinn Health Care College.

Finding, analysing and reproducing information are important skills to be acquired in every field of modern life. In order to develop these skills it is necessary to start already during the first year of the studies and teach students how to use different scientific databases and how to analyse and synthesise the information and write academic papers, as students are generally not accustomed to the requirements of higher education institutions. Modern approach to teaching requires the lecturer to be able to integrate technology, pedagogy and content [1]. The following core features of CLIL methology [2] are used in the Module: integrating several subjects (Information Research, Estonian and English Language, Computer Skills), authenticity (using current materials from different online databases), scaffolding (fostering critical thinking), and active learning (favouring peer co-operative work and evaluation). Blended learning, which combines learning modalities involving face-to-face instruction and Web-based learning delivery (from 30 to 79%) [4], is carefully designed using a customized instructional strategy that leverages the strengths of each student and offers an opportunity to make learning more attractive, modern and useful.

Research Methodology Module

In Tallinn Health Care College, Research Methodology Module was created and is among other curricula also used in the Nursing Curriculum. The students of the Nursing Curriculum graduate by writing and defending a final thesis. Students with different native languages (Estonian or Russian) study on the Nursing Curriculum and for them English is a second or a third foreign language. The curriculum offers several possibilities to create modules by integrating different subjects and the method has been used already since 2009. To aid students in writing and defending their final papers Research Methodology Module lasts throughout the studies - three and a half years. During the first year basic knowledge is aquired; students learn to search for and use evidence-based knowledge in

developing their profession in concordance with ethical principles; they acquire knowledge about principles and goals of research in the field of nursing; get knowledge about theoretical and practical skills in writing an academic research paper. The goal and outcome of the module is an academic report written in Estonian using both Estonian and English sources. The goals are achieved in cooperation with lecturers of different subjects.
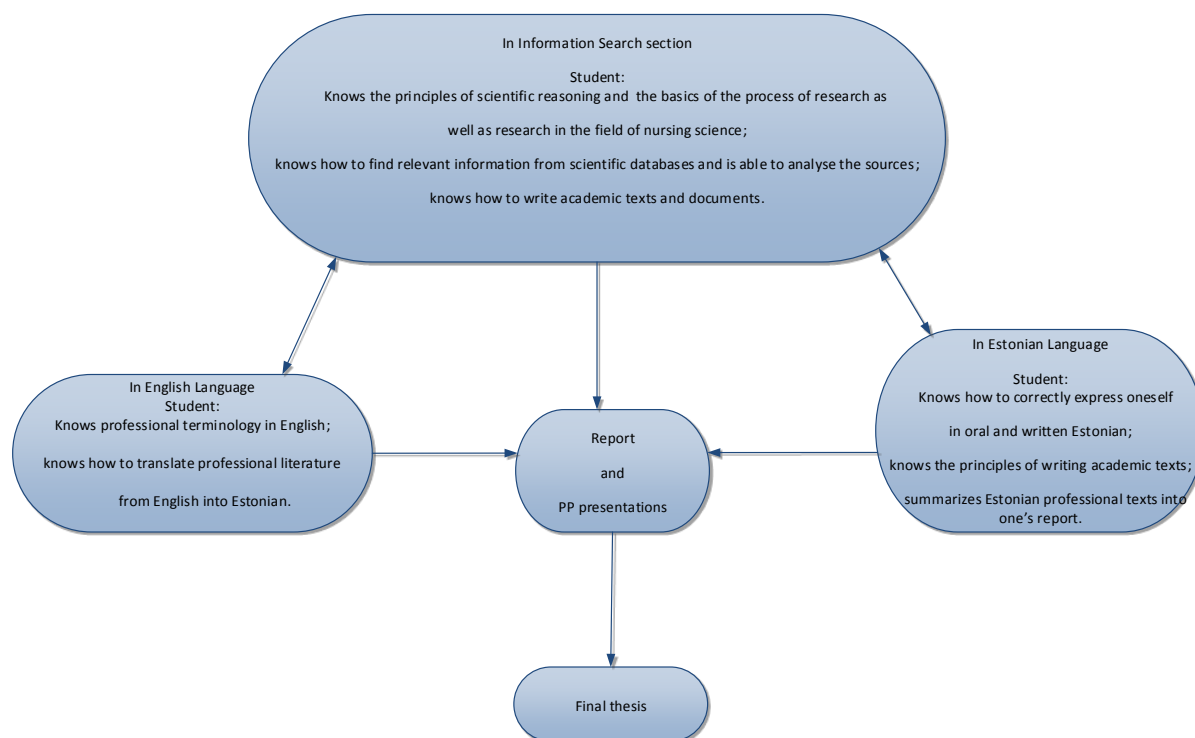

Fig1. Research Methodology Module structure.

Information Search

In the Information Search section of the module students acquire knowledge and practical skills how to use various professional databases (Ebsco, BioMed Central, Clinical Evidence, Health Evidence Network (HEN), etc.) and how to write student papers. College has its specific requirements on how to create mainly PowerPoint presentations and written papers. The first task is to collect and analyse information and write a report. Speciality lecturer aids students in choosing the topic of the report and the search terms as well as selecting suitable articles from the databases. Students are encouraged to continue with the same topic and developing it into their final thesis. The lecturer of Information Search assesses the technical part of the report.

English Language

In the English language part of the module students are introduced with the professional terminology of the field of nursing and are taught how to translate articles from English into Estonian. In choosing the professional terminology the lecturer of English language works in cooperation with speciality lecturers. To learn and remember the terminology scientific articles are read online, they are analysed and suitability criteria are discussed in specially created Facebook groups as well as during lectures. The articles are summarized and introduced to the rest of the group. During the discussion the words are paraphrased and synonyms and definitions are explained to the group. In doing so the cooperation skills that are enourmosly important in everyday and future professional lives are developed while getting an overview of the most recent authentic materials. Integrated reading and writing activities benefit the learner with respect to both content learning and language learning processes. As for language gains, processing information and constructing new texts based on prior reading help students develop overall target language competence - in particular, it builds up reading and writing skills, as well as discourse skills and helps students expand their vocabulary. [3].

As the report to be written is required to have at least one English source, students translate the relevant part of the article and analyse the translation with the English language lecturer. Afterwards a five-minute PowerPoint presentation in English is created from the selected article and is presented with explanations and reasons of the choice. Group members respond by giving feedback on the terminology, article and presentation and when necessary and possible, make suggestions on further research. While preparing for the presentation and writing the report, students learn to use professional interactive dictionaries (e.g http://eemwd.comeze.com, a professional English-Estonian dictionary) English language lecturer assesses the acquisition of professional English language and oral presentation of the article.

Estonian Language

In the Estonian language part of the module necessary knowledge of Estonian normative scientific language and its usage are acquired as students generally have no previous knowledge of using it in academic context. Studies start with theoretical topics and exercises of Estonian language. Interactive exercises consist of language exercises (grammar, lexis, etc.) as well as finding and correcting the mistakes in previously written student research papers. Also different Web-based handbooks and dictionaries are introduced to the students (e.g. Estonian Orthodology Dictionary 2013 http://www.eki.ee/dict/qs/,; Estonian language explanatory dictionary http://www.eki.ee/dict/ekss/, where the meaning of a word is explained through examples of usage; Estonian language tests http://keeleabi.eki.ee/?leht=11, which include exercises on most common mistakes made). The Estonian Language part of the module ends with an online written test. Also, the students give a five-minute PowerPoint presentation of their report to practice public presentation of one's research. The lecturer of Estonian language assesses the language of the report.

Summary and Discussion

After passing Research Methodolgy Module students know how to find topical information from the databases and analyse professional scientific articles, is able to   use correct written and oral Estonian, know the principles of writing academic texts, know how to summarize and quote scientific articles and is able to translate professional English articles into correct Estonian. In addition students acquire the computer skills to perform different tasks and write documents. As a means to assess the goals of the Research Methodology Module the following tasks are evaluated: Estonian language test, report in Estonian, oral presentations both in Estonian and English. The main problems that occur are rather technical, for example there are difficulties in organizing the schedule of the lectures– lecturer of Information search starts the module and is followed by English lecturer together with Estonian lecturer and again concluded by the Information search lecturer. The topic of logical structure has been thoroughly discussed among the lecturers and it has been agreed that cooperation with the personnel who enter the schedule of the module to the Web-based study info system should be more frequent and thourough. The number of lectures involved in the module as well as quite a large number of students somewhat complicate the process of agreeing on the due dates and topics of the reports. To solve the beforementioned difficulties lecturers are encouraged to find extra time and meet several times before and during the module to make necessary agreements and facilitate the teaching and learning process. Students who have previously graduated from another higher education institution need quite often more attention as they are accustomed to different requirements of academic writing. Certainly some thought has to be put into considering the pros and cons of other systems of writing academic texts to make the requirements more logical and thus completing the tasks easier. Taken all the beforementioned into account the lecturers agree that by enhancing communication and cooperation between lecturers and students the possible occuring problems can be and are successfully solved and the experience gained be well used in the future.

Feedback

Students have mentioned in their feedback that they find the module an innovative form of studying and at the same time very efficient which in long-term supports and facilitates the writing of final

thesis. In the feedback the logical structure of various parts of the module and its importance in the study process are emphasized.

Lecturers underline the effectiveness of blended learning in the module in creating modern learning environment, where the cooperation between students and lecturers allows to achieve better results in supervising written research papers and reports and in correct use of professional language.

References

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