Chapter 2

E–Learning Tools Applied in Teaching English at the University Level

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ABSTRACT

The chapter gives an overview of the current literature on e-learning goals and theoretical background of design of e-learning courses. Conditions of successful implementation of e-learning include technical, organizational, pedagogical, and psychological conditions. The chapter explains terms such as computer-assisted language learning and digital literacy. The author clarifies some issues related to efficient e-learning course delivery, including the learner and teacher perception. A practical example of an online Business English course in the Moodle system at the university level is analyzed. Student and instructor feedback provides insight into problems and obstacles in learning languages in the online mode. The chapter offers recommendations for online course design and lists issues that need special attention and that will be addressed in future research.

INTRODUCTION

Economic, technological, and social development puts pressure on university graduates, who should be able to function in a knowledge society. To deal with these new challenges, many universities are starting to use a distance mode of course delivery (Peat & Franklin, 2002). Various forms of distance learning include fully Web-based (online) or hybrid (blended) courses with a mix of Web-based and traditional course delivery forms. Researchers and experts provide a variety of arguments in favor or against application of the online delivery of learning material, taking into consideration many psychological, pedagogical, linguistic, technical, economic, and other criteria. Online learning, also called e-Learning, is a fascinating and rapidly developing area of human activity, so we need to constantly follow the latest trends in order to take and apply the best possible solutions. Many controversial issues and unanswered questions require closer study and specification of e-Learning objectives and tools. The aim of this chapter is to provide various points of view justifying online

learning and its prerequisites, with the specific focus on teaching the English language in the online mode at the university level. The author presents various factors that need to be considered and applied in designing of a successful online English course, with the special attention paid to the learning content design and the student-teacher interaction. The author describes design of her own English language courses in the learning management system Moodle. She summarizes collected student and instructor feedback. The chapter offers recommendations for online course design and lists issues that need special attention and that will be addressed in further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

e-Learning or Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

e-Learning is usually defined as "learning facilitated and supported through the use of information and communication technologies." (Sanchez-Villalon et al., 2010) A study of Peat and Franklin presents four main reasons why the Web is becoming more frequently applied in teaching: the number of staff per student has decreased; courses have a module form and materials need to be shared; technology meets user expectations; learners expect that a university will be involved in information technology and computer-assisted learning.

Deall (2002) lists the following main advantages of distance learning (and e-Learning):

- **Independency:** It can provide the opportunity to learn even to those individuals who do not have any other possibility to study and are limited by time and space conditions;
- **Flexibility:** Students may access learning materials and respond to them at any time;

- **Effectiveness:** The distance learning form may be as effective as the traditional classroom form if timely teacher-learner interaction is ensured;
- **Efficiency:** Technology-based courses require less time than classroom instruction does, which leads to cost saving;
- **Multi-Sensory Experiences:** Various kinds of media can be used, so various learning styles can be suited;
- **Interactivity:** Learners have many possibilities to communicate with each other thanks to various IT tools, such as e-mail, chat, video conferencing, etc.;
- **Affordability:** Many distance learning courses are of a relatively low cost.

In her research of online learners at the university level, I. Cimermanová (2011) came to the conclusion that university students are ready to work in the online environment and that they can obtain the same results, whether they study online or in the traditional, face-to-face format. She conducted a study of 125 students of pedagogy at the Prešov University in Slovakia. The students of the specialization English language and literature were divided into two groups (experimental – 63 students and controlled – 62 students) based on their preference for on-campus study and e-course study during one semester. The course was focused on TEFL (teaching English as a Foreign Language) methodology. The e-course group used the LMS Moodle with multimedia support. The learners' performance in the course was evaluated in 3 performance tests. The results of the experiment showed no significant difference in performance in the two groups of learners. This outcome was also proven by an ANCOVA test used for data analysis. Regarding the need of communication between learners and tutors, Cimermanová (2011) claims that "the correct ways of approaching learners can substitute the physical presence of the teacher" (p. 31). Moreover, university students are able to

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