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A CROSS- CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE VOCATIONAL TESTING

МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ПОДХОД К ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОМУ ТЕСТИРОВАНИЮ

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ABSTRACT

MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT,
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, THE VOCATIONAL
TESTING, BLENDED LEARNING, TEACHING
TECHNIQUES, THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS

The article deals with a role of blended learning as a main method of teaching, and computer-based tests as an integral component of an EFL course for non-linguistic students who need to communicate effectively in English. Along with other methods, special attention must be paid to computer-based tests, which are becoming more and more common in foreign language skills assessment. WE defined that the most difficult tasks were writing essays and progress tests.

АННОТАЦИЯ

ОТНОСЯЩАЯСЯ К РАЗНЫМ КУЛЬТУРАМ
СРЕДА, ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНАЯ СИСТЕМА, ПРО-
ФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЕ ТЕСТИРОВАНИЕ, СМЕ-
ШАННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ, ОБУЧАЮЩИЕ МЕТО-
ДЫ, ТЕСТЫ НА МНОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ ВЫБОР

В статье рассматривается роль смешанного обучения как основного метода обучения, и компьютерных тестов, как неотъемлемого компонента курса EFL для студентов неязыковых вузов, которым необходимо эффективно общаться на английском языке. Мы определили, что самыми сложными задачами являются написание эссе, и тестов для оценки успеха.

Contemporary educational process is a subject to constant evolution, whose driving force is the process of technological development. The institution of higher education is also perceived differently, namely as a place of acquiring knowledge virtually rather than in a traditional way.

Today's graduates of technical university will have to work in multicultural environment. One should be aware that the duality and differences in the interpretation of certain phenomena by students of different cultures is inevitability inherent in the structure of the modern world.

There are at least two approaches for defining the role of education in the society. According

to the first one education is an instrument for fixation, reproduction and compiling of the existing system of relationships in the society. In this case education plays a subordinate role and follows the society development. It is just the condition of the society that defines the content of education and possibilities for future change.

The second approach is based on the idea that education is not only the factor of knowledge reproduction but it is motive power of society development. It is a unique tool that allows reconsidering the existing system of relations in the society and transition to a new stage of development. This means completely different content of educational system and its organization. In our opinion the second approach should underlie in Belarusian education reforms.

The higher education institutions recognize the necessity of critically examining the current practices and the potential of information and communication technologies. The challenge now is to gain a deep understanding of the need, potential and strategies of such technology as blended learning to approach the ideals of higher education. It is obvious that only continuing the formation of new educational paradigm Belarusian higher education will get a chance to acquire leading positions in the world.

We defined blended learning as a method of teaching that combines the most effective face-to-face teaching techniques and online interactive collaboration, both constituting a system that functions in constant correlation and forms a single whole. The system will work effectively only if its components are balanced and methodically adequate to program educational objectives. Blending of face-to-face and online learning environments should be planned precisely in order to benefit more from this approach.

Blended learning makes it possible to vary the pace of new material study and self-work. A great variety of tasks in the online component of the blended course contributes both to elimination of knowledge gaps and profound material study. For example, for the same text in foreign language students can be offered tasks of different difficulty level. Weak students have an opportunity to practice first some simple tasks, while strong students can immediately go to the tasks of high complexity. It is important that students have the possibility of choice which is substantially the basis of any creativity. This approach develops students' adequate self-esteem; they should define an appropriate level of difficulty and make the right choice. Situations of choice encourage students' inner motivation and responsibility for their academic success. Moreover people learn better when they have more than one media to use.

The simple fact that there are two or three different types of training: reading a book, trying out a skill on an exercise, listening to a lecture, and interacting with a web-based course has a significant impact on mastery and retention.

According to our researches there are two independent systems of foreign language performance that can be used to learn a foreign language: acquisition and learning. These two systems are different but related.

Acquisition is the natural, subconscious process that involves constant exposure to the language. Ideally, the learner is surrounded by native speakers and is required to use a language in order to communicate.

On the contrary, learning is the formal conscious process by which the learner is taught rules of the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules.

Along with other methods, special attention must be paid to computer-based tests, which are becoming more and more common in foreign language skills assessment. The first test battery was designed for the learners of the intermediate level of communicative competence. It should be noted that grammar was not a random choice. Therefore, it is difficult for students to speak English well without learning English grammar.

The tests are aimed at practicing the usage of English verb tenses in different aspects of the English grammar. These are the tests of the multiple-choice format based on the vocabulary familiar to the students. The multiple-choice format is a commonly used type of tests and it was used for our tests.

We have chosen the Quiz module of the Virtual Learning Environment Moodle - Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment to deploy the tests. Moodle is provided freely in Belarusian universities as Open Source software.

The learning process is based on traditional teaching of a discipline and on-line learning, using the e-course developed in LMS Moodle for monitoring the students' self-study. At the beginning students get teacher's on-line instructions in the classroom saving time for the quiz and the results discussed.

The results of the survey held for the second year students showed that the majority of students 90 % prefer blended learning and only 4 % want to have traditional form of learning and nobody wanted to learn foreign languages only online. Students mentioned the participation in webinars and online discussions as the most amusing tasks.

It turned out that the most difficult tasks were writing essays and progress tests. Students told about the factors that complicated the study of the course, they marked out: unstable Internet connection, large quantity of people taking part in discussions, lack of time for online tasks. But still most of students mentioned that it was convenient to have 24 hour access to the course materials. The survey showed that students support integration of blended learning in the process of teaching foreign languages.

However, the teachers understand the possibilities of blended learning, when online learning combines with traditional teaching as a perspective of education. These facts demonstrate the proper priorities in new educational methods, development and implement of e-learning for teaching languages.

Blended learning is a form of learning that combines traditional full-time form of teaching with modern forms of e-learning, increasing the advantages and offsetting the disadvantages of each. The modular organization of teaching provides the flexibility of the program. Students

choose a module by interest, but irrelevant, well known already information they may pass, according to individual learning strategy.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that along with apparent advantages, implementation of computer-based testing also increases the teacher's working load, who has to spend more time to compile enough quantity of relevant to the learning objectives grammar tests, and this is an incredibly time-consuming and tedious process.