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ONLINE SUPPORT FOR TEACHING LINGUISTIC DISCIPLINES: MYTHS AND REALITY

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the issues of online support for teaching linguistic disciplines at the university. On the example of the Moodle learning platform, the broad capabilities of this electronic educational platform are considered, describes the specifics of organizing classroom training sessions with online support. Special attention is paid to the myths existing in the modern educational environment associated with the Moodle system. Based on the research of the material of developed by the teachers of the Russian language department of the philological faculty of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia online distance courses of both general education disciplines (for example, "Culture of speech" and "Rhetoric"), and purely philological subjects (for example, "Lexicology of the Russian language" and "Fundamentals of the science of language"), the authors of the article tried to share a possible algorithm for the development of remote support of linguistic disciplines. Evaluation of the specifics of each of the linguistic disciplines taught, a clear understanding of the purpose and objectives of the online distance course, constant work with the selection of a wide range of material for each course - taking into account the main stages in the process of creating remote support will maximize the effectiveness of this course. Analyzing the work at each of the highlighted stages, the authors of the article considered the myths that surround the modern system of distance education, and shared examples of real work situations.

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Keywords: Distance education system, electronic educational resources, lexicology, linguistic disciplines, Moodle system, phonetics



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1. Introduction

Modern higher education at the beginning of the XXI century cannot exist without the use of computer technologies that make it possible to increase the efficiency of both the teacher and the student. One of the platforms for distance education, which is actively used in domestic higher education, is the Moodle system. Moodle (Module Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a free Learning Management System (Virtual Learning Environment), which is licensed under the GNU General Public License. The first version of this electronic educational platform dates back to 2002, and it was from this time that the distance learning tool (hereinafter - LMS) Moodle began to be experimentally introduced into the higher education system. A decade later, in December 2012, the State Duma adopted the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation", which defines the implementation of educational programs using the basics of e-learning and distance learning technologies. It is from this moment that the distance education system becomes the second *reality* for every university teacher: all work programs of all academic disciplines are developed with a mandatory indication of electronic educational resources (hereinafter - EER) and electronic educational platforms (hereinafter - EEP) accompanying this discipline.

LMS Moodle allows you to create proper distance courses and e-courses for remote support of classroom disciplines, which is especially important in the context of reducing classroom hours and increasing hours for students' independent work. It is obvious that the creation of distance courses for the humanities is a rather serious problem for a number of reasons. First, there is a myth that distance education platforms in general are more focused on the exact sciences (especially in the creation of tests and control materials). An analysis of scientific literature partly confirms this: many researchers share examples of developed distance courses of a technical orientation (Baiguzhin et al., 2019; Erokhin et al., 2018; Pisarev, 2012). Secondly, difficulties arise also because humanities teachers often have psychological barriers (including those formed by this myth) that prevent them from comprehending the taught disciplines as a basis for creating a distance course (Ivanova & Popova, 2017; Pushkarev & Pushkareva, 2019; Usacheva & Chernyakov, 2020).

In our opinion, this basic problem is not solved by those advanced training courses that are organized in most universities to train teaching staff to work with Moodle (Lomonosova & Zolkina, 2018) and other similar systems. Such classes are usually conducted by specialists in technical specialties, who sparingly and very "technically" reveal the potential of LMS, highlight the differences in the purpose of chats, webinars and forums, but, unfortunately, do not explain the most important thing: WHY representatives of classical university education should develop and use distance courses.

2. Problem Statement

In the presented article, we will leave out of the scope of our attention what in most cases attracts modern researchers: we will not focus our research interest on the positive (Kameneva & Bondarenko, 2018; Young, 2018) and negative aspects of using distance educational platforms in general, and LMS Moodle in particular. We believe that time and pedagogical experience will put everything in its place and at the same time will objectively demonstrate both the pros and cons of our new educational *reality*.

In addition to the strengths and weaknesses of distance education, which for the most part are already well known and described in detail (Kelly et al., 2016), the current state of the educational process indicates that there are more questions than answers regarding distance support. Identification, comparison and analysis of real educational needs and real technological contradictions allow us to identify the problem of our research: *under what conditions and thanks to what kind of additional technological capabilities the distance education system performs the function of remote support of academic disciplines.*

3. Research Questions

The formulated problem can be concretized due to the following research questions:

3.1. Under what conditions is remote support of academic disciplines possible?

3.2. What additional functions does the training course acquire in the Moodle LMS?

3.3. How can a roadmap for distance learning support be defined?

4. Purpose of the Study

Thus, the purpose of this article is very specific: on the material of distance courses developed by teachers of the Russian language department of the philological faculty of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, to analyze the real situation associated with remote support of linguistic disciplines, debunking the myths that surround it, and identifying the main points that must be taken into account when developing a distance course.

5. Research Methods

The leading research methods of this problem are the *comparison, analysis and generalization* of the practical and theoretical material accumulated in recent years. Developed by teachers of the Russian language department of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, the presented algorithm for remote support of linguistic disciplines is accompanied by real examples of using the Moodle LMS when studying such courses as "Fundamentals of the science of language", "Culture of speech", "Rhetoric", "Spelling trainer", "Modern Russian: spelling", "Modern Russian: lexicology".

6. Findings

6.1. One of the most effective ways to overcome the psychological barrier, in our opinion, is to develop a clear strategy for creating a course. **The first stage in the development** of such a **strategy** is to assess the specifics of each taught discipline in terms of the possibility of creating a distance course on its basis. For example, when planning the e-course "Rhetoric", it is necessary to take into account the fact that this discipline is aimed primarily at improving the skills of oral speech, so the creation of tests with automated verification will be almost impossible. In fully distance courses, this problem can be partially solved by using an activity that is called an *assignment* in the Moodle system. The teacher uploads the assignment, students can upload any digital content as a response.

Each linguistic discipline, due to the specifics of the subject being studied and the clear boundaries of the knowledge, skills and abilities (or competencies) being formed, has a peculiarity that is naturally reflected in the methodological support, both classical and innovative (distance). And in the absolute *reality* of the requirement for mandatory remote support of each course, the same absolute *myth* is that most disciplines in the space of an electronic educational platform can be created and developed according to the same template. On the contrary, each subject in the LMS Moodle is an author's course that is significantly different from other distance courses. For example, the compulsory subject "Culture of speech", which is included in the basic part of the disciplines of any faculty, in the space of the electronic educational platform of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia is markedly different in methodological content depending on the faculty.

6.2. That is why each discipline that is planned to be accompanied by a distance course must be assessed according to the following parameters:

- the ability to use automated methods of control;
- the availability of video, audio and other forms of visualization and the expediency of its use;
- the ratio of lectures and practical classes and forms of control;
- the possibility of carrying out current and semester certification in oral / written form;
- the number of teachers supervising the subject and their willingness to coordinate their actions during lectures and seminars;
- possible technical difficulties associated with the complexity of the rendering of phonetic transcription or graphics (for example, Old Church Slavonic text).

Identifying the features of the discipline that limit the possibilities of creating a distance course to it should in no case lead to a refusal to create a course: it only helps to more clearly define the purpose of the course, which is the **second stage in developing** such a **strategy**.

6.3. It is important to understand **why** the teacher himself needs the course. Perhaps the teacher expects that the use of an automated form of control will save time for checking papers. And this is also a *myth* in a certain sense: in *reality*, such saving occurs only in the long term and with the simultaneous enrollment of a large number of students on the course. Otherwise, the effort to create one test is significantly higher than the effort to check, say, 100 student papers.

Unfortunately, many teachers who are aimed at creating such tests overlook another real feature of the distance course: to create an effective test of ten questions, you need to put at least one hundred questions in the database, since one question in the test must include at least from 10 of the same type, but different elements, from among which a choice will occur in random order for each specific student. Such tasks are called parallel (faceted) and are defined as "tasks that have a similar content from one didactic unit, approximately the same measures of difficulty and variation in the test results" (Erofeev & Sychev, 2013, p. 42). In LMS Moodle, such tasks of the same type in the question bank are combined into so-called categories.

The *reality* of distance learning requires tests of the parallel (facet) type, since otherwise the student who has already passed the test will share the results with everyone else, and the possibility of objective assessment will be minimized. So, in the course "Modern Russian: lexicology" we created, the final test, consisting of 50 questions, required the creation of a database of faceted tasks, including more than 900

questions (according to the most conservative estimates, this is more than 50 hours of work without taking into account the time for selecting the vocabulary materials themselves). By the way, it is on this example that one more reality of the development and creation of distance courses can be identified: this type of methodological work requires a colossal amount of additional time, which is not taken into account by anyone anywhere. We add from ourselves that at the same time the teacher continues to lecture, conduct practical classes, update materials, check papers, accept debts and engage in science.

If we consider more options for goals, then most often the teacher, who has realized the complexity of creating a test, thinks of his course as a kind of multimedia reader, in which links to materials and resources are grouped by the topics studied. The effectiveness of this approach is not very high, since links to each lesson can be just as well sent by e-mail. However, in some cases, such a structure of the course justifies itself: for example, in the course "Orthoepy" (Gubernskaya, 2016), it is very significant for a student to listen to and to analyze a huge number of diverse audio fragments at a convenient pace and mode, which is often for various reasons (technical, temporary, etc.) is impossible in class. However, the addition of two or three extracurricular independent work to the course dramatically increases the effectiveness of the distance course.

Another possible goal of the course is to consolidate the knowledge and skills gained in classroom lessons and develop the corresponding skills. In this case, the course can be used as a workbook and include a large number of training exercises. The advantage of the training exercises is that not only and not so much the correctness of the answers is assessed, but the systematic character of the student's work. In this case, it is possible not to do ten to twenty variants of the same task, but it is important to require weekly performance of training exercises.

The combination of several goals in one course is certainly possible, but it requires much more effort. For example, the creation of a similar course in the discipline "Fundamentals of the Science of Language" for 1st year students of the philological faculty of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia required two years of work from us, and in the first year we only filled the course with links and created test papers on all topics of seminars. lessons (three tests were created in the "Phonetics" section and two - in the "Grammar" section). Only in the second year did we manage to start developing training exercises for each topic, and this taking into account the fact that we had materials for training: with the kind permission of Diana Valentinovna Salmina, who provided methodological support for this distance course throughout the work on it, and Irina Stepanovna Kulikova, for the development of exercises, we used the "Educational-methodological recommendations" and "Workbook" - parts of the innovative educational-methodical complex "Theory of Language" (Kulikova & Salmina, 2009), and also for the development of exercises on terminology materials from the "Teaching Dictionary of Linguistic Terms" by the same authors (Kulikova & Salmina, 2004) were used. Frankly, we still do not consider this distance course completely finished: it is obvious that there are sections that need to be supplemented and detailed.

In the light of recent events on a global scale, one more point has become obvious: the sudden and abrupt transition of many educational institutions completely to distance forms of work has debunked the *myth* that courses designed for remote support of classroom disciplines can fully provide distance education. Even those courses that we perceived as fully formed and not requiring further serious changes, turned out to be unsuitable for the transition to a new format of education.

For example, for the discipline "Workshop on spelling" of the course "Modern Russian language" (2017-2018 year of admission) / "Modern Russian literary language" (2019 year of admission) at the department of Russian language of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia the course "Spelling Trainer" was developed, the main purpose of which was to consolidate the skills of literate writing among 1st year students of the faculty of philology. In the future, it was planned to use the materials of this course (of course, taking into account the minimum correction) to work with students of such departments of the Herzen University, as the Institute of the Peoples of the North and the Institute of Defectological Education and Rehabilitation. Note that work with the course materials was not mandatory and was not evaluated, however, it was recommended to those students who realized that their literate writing skills needed to be developed. At the time of the introduction of the self-isolation regime (early March 2020), about 70% of 1st year students of the Faculty of Philology were enrolled in the course, and it was students with a high level of literacy that were active users.

The transition to distance education (from March 16, 2020) completely changed the situation: now all students have signed up for the course. However, it became obvious that in the form in which this course was created, it could not meet the needs of distance education, since initially the "Spelling Trainer" was not adapted to test the level of knowledge and skills: there was not a single timed assignment, all dictations and exercises were open for repetition, which is justified for the simulator, but does not work in other conditions. Due to the changed external requirements, in addition to opening forums and chats, creating remote attendance logs, teachers were forced to create not training, but control tasks and identify the level of mastering the material remotely.

Thus, it is important to understand the purpose of creating the course and determine what it will become: a collection of tasks and tests, with the help of which the current certification is carried out; a kind of multimedia reader, in which a large number of materials have been collected that make it easier for students to master the course, a collection of training exercises, with the help of which skills and abilities are consolidated (competencies formation), a comprehensive course, completely withdrawn to a distance format (for debtors who have recovered, with an academic difference, for all students in self-isolation and / or quarantine).

6.4. The **third stage in developing a strategy** is the selection of material for the course, and this applies both to various kinds of audio, video and other multimedia materials, as well as texts for analysis, which, of course, is a key problem for philological disciplines.

In this case, the world of information technologies in education intersects with the world of law and law in an interesting way. The *reality* of our time is such that the difficulties of selecting multimedia can be associated with issues of copyright protection: any video, any picture, any text belongs to someone, and using them even for a non-commercial purpose, we, unwillingly, may violate copyright.

For example, in the already mentioned course "Spelling Trainer", we form vocabulary dictations on all topics using Forvo.com (<https://ru.forvo.com/>) - a website that contains audio files with the pronunciation of words recorded by native speakers of the most common languages of the world. Although the recording of words on this site is a form of Internet volunteering, the use of the site materials is limited by the CC BY-NC-SA license, that is, it allows you to use the work only on a non-commercial basis with

the obligatory mention of authorship, therefore, in each exercise where the site materials are used, we warn users that the audio files of this resource were used to create the exercise.

However, even greater difficulties are associated with the selection of texts for analysis (Gubernskaya, 2015). Even if we are talking about a training exercise, which may exist in a single copy and is intended to consolidate skills and abilities, it is quite difficult to find a text in which already studied phenomena are present and unknown ones are absent. If we are looking for texts for creating faceted tasks, and not single exercises, another difficulty becomes real: the need to search for a large number of similar texts for analysis, since each student must receive a question of the same difficulty and on the same topic in the test as his/her fellow student, and there should be 10-15 such questions in the category, otherwise the test cannot be used as a control one. Even representatives of the exact sciences have such problems with the selection of such material.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the practical material considered in the presented article allows us to draw the following **conclusions:**

- The use of LMS is one of the obligatory features of the Russian educational process at the beginning of the 21st century.
- The opinion that distance support is intended rather for disciplines of a technical direction, and that it is impossible to create actually working linguistic courses of a philological orientation, does not correspond to reality.
- A clear understanding of the specifics of a linguistic discipline, awareness of the purpose of the course and careful selection of the necessary material is the right way to create effective distance support for the course.
- It is necessary to develop new methodological approaches to presenting linguistic disciplines in a new format, and this is a matter for the future.
- Higher education at the end of the 20th century and the 20s of the 21st century differ significantly from each other in the degree of compulsory involvement of elements of distance education in the educational process. This is the *reality* of our days: every educational course at a university must be duplicated in the Internet space by its remote counterpart. The purpose of the presented article is to describe distance support specifically for teaching linguistic courses.

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