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**E-LEARNING RESOURCES IN LANGUAGE TEACHER  
TRAINING**

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***Abstract***

The article discusses the use of e-learning resources in designing and delivering the modules for professional training of foreign language teachers. The authors study the features of different types of training with the use of information and communication technologies (computer-mediated, e-learning, blended learning) and prove that these technologies have a number of learning opportunities. The authors look at the definition and core features of e-learning resources and suggest that e-learning resources used in the blended learning format of professional training at university contribute to the formation of a language teacher's key competencies necessary for their future professional activity. The experience of the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology at Voronezh university of using the blended learning technology is presented, and the structure of training modules developed for the master programme "Teaching languages with the use of online technologies" is considered. Various e-learning resources to support both face-to-face and distance parts of the modules are described, with special attention to such e-learning resource designed as a language teacher's virtual workshop aimed to simulate a real-life language teaching process, and with that to broaden students' subject and interdisciplinary knowledge, to develop their skills of processing a large amount of information and readiness to use technologies as a means of constructing diverse educational and methodological support in a language teaching process to increase its efficiency. On the basis of the above-mentioned, the conclusion about a number of benefits of using e-learning resources in the educational process is made.

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**Keywords:** E-learning, blended learning, language teacher training.



## 1. Introduction

The socioeconomic situation in Russia today requires significant reforms in the content of teacher training. One of the resolutions of the Government of the Russian Federation indicates, among the priority areas for the development of education until 2025, the need to create training programmes implementing information and communication technologies (Postanovlenie Pravitelstva RF ot 26 dekabria 2017 g. № 1642 “Ob utverzhdenii gosudarstvennoy programmy Rossiiskoy Federacii “Razvitie obrazovaniya”). Currently, in connection with the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), the success of teaching depends on how the teacher is able to use their professional competencies not only in classroom interaction but also in computer/technology-mediated communication.

The use of ICT in education is caused by the necessity to solve such tasks as:

- developing e-learning resources, among them electronic educational learning complexes, electronic test materials, etc.;
- introducing e-learning systems and using e-learning technology on their basis;
- supporting learners' access to information and educational content.

The extent to which ICT are used in the educational process can be different, varying from using Internet resources for designing presentations, e-mail projects and web quests (Martynova, 2014) to distance learning. Open access to virtual learning environments, such as Moodle and other learning management systems, contributes to the development of new online courses for language learning. However, researchers note, electronic educational learning complexes are often created “with no focus on modern principles of language teaching” (Safonova, 2011, p. 3) and represent an electronic copy of paper versions, with no changes made except for presenting the same material on an electronic medium (Tracey, 2010).

It becomes important, for effective language teacher training, in addition to clarifying theoretical principles of introducing ICT into language teaching, to make the analysis of the conditions which provide the effective use of e-learning resources in the educational process at university. E-learning resources are normally defined as electronic publications containing systemic data of theoretical or applied nature, represented in the form suitable for teaching and studying with the use of ICT (Sevastianova, 2006). Within our research, we understand e-learning resources as all the information accumulated and recorded on various media or located in a computer network, as well as a combination of the two above-mentioned, transmitted in time and space between participants of the educational process in order to form their professional competencies in the relevant subject area.

## 2. Problem Statement

It is to find the solution to the problem of introducing ICT into the educational process at university and ensuring that e-learning resources become its integral part. What is the pedagogical reasonability of using e-learning resources to meet a set of language teacher training requirements?

E-learning resources have been widely used abroad for a quite long time (Fandei, 2011; Handke & Schäfer, 2012; Hofmann, 2011; Hutz, 2008; Keegan, 1996; Pal-Liebscher & Wittan, 2015; Raith, 2009; Raith & Hegelheimer, 2010; Raith & Mueller-Hartman, 2008; Rösler, 2010; Warschauer, 2006); they are

also quite well-known in Russia, however, their role in the educational process, and most importantly, the pace of implementation continues to be rather insignificant. The conducted studies (Dochkin, Michurina, & Tupikina, 2015; Khudoverdova, 2015; Kuklev, 2010; Martynova, 2014; Safonova, 2011; Sevastianova, 2006; Yakovleva, 2007) allow to identify a number of main reasons to explain such situation.

The first reason can be defined as organisational: the existing regulatory framework interprets the concept of “e-learning” and its related derivatives too widely: distance learning, distance technologies, ICT, etc. (O federalnoy tselevoy programme “Elektronnaya Rossiya (2002-2010 gody)”. Postanovlenie Pravitelstva RF ot 28 yanvaria 2002 g. № 65, 2011). This situation allows free interpretation of the existing e-learning resources and, as a consequence, does not presuppose systematic and consistent planning of their use in teacher training.

The second reason is teachers’ unwillingness to use modern content management systems, to create interactive educational learning materials and to use the means of network communication. At the same time, as our observations show, the majority of teachers have quite positive attitude to modern means of information processing and electronic communication, they use e-mail and Internet resources. However, on the whole this does not affect the dynamics of changes in the number of new e-learning materials and online courses.

The third reason is the quality gap referring to online courses. Currently, their content can mostly be described as text documents presented in Word, PDF, or PowerPoint formats. These are quite common formats that allow to organise work with materials, however, they do not provide interactivity and feedback. Moreover, nothing but reading such materials reduces the motivation to learn and becomes even less effective compared to traditional face-to-face work with a teacher in the classroom, and thus entails the opposite effect.

There is one more problem connected with the readiness of students themselves. It is generally accepted that ICT are close to young people today, and the interactive information-rich environment is in their great demand. However, this environment presupposes not only vivid and creative presentation of educational content; it also requires students’ active autonomous work, constant feedback, implementation of specific tasks and activities, provides objective assessment of their performance according to a set of certain criteria, eliminates subjectivity, etc. All this is not always perceived by students positively, and sometimes they turn out to be not ready for such demanding, independent, productive work.

### **3. Research Questions**

The tasks of updating the content of teacher training (Serikov, Mikhailova, & Scherbakova, 2017) and introducing ICT into the university educational process require considering the following questions.

The first question is connected with professional competencies of a language teacher who should meet the requirements of the present-day educational reality. The question can be formulated as follows: what new tasks are confronted by teachers in the era of informatisation of education?

The second question is related to the potential of e-learning resources for the development of the necessary language teacher professional competencies. Will the use of e-learning resources in the educational process at university provide the required quality of language teacher training?

The third question concerns the technology of organising the educational process at university with the use of e-learning resources: synchronous / asynchronous learning (Develotte & Mangenot, 2010), modular training (Scherbakova & Chaika, 2015), e-learning (Dochkin et al., 2015; Handke & Schäfer, 2012; Pal-Liebscher & Wittan, 2015; Rösler, 2010), blended learning (Fenenko & Bulgakova, 2016; Hofmann, 2011; Graham, 2004; Tomlinson & Whittaker, 2013). Blended learning allows to combine traditional teaching methods and innovative technologies; therefore, in today's educational environment, this training format is a priority (Garton, 2016). The student becomes an active participant of the educational process, able to build their individual educational trajectory based on their own needs and goals. E-learning "improves learning, mirrors its trends and provides constant access to information at any time and from any place" (Kuklev, 2010, p. 91). The above-mentioned technologies make the learning process accessible and personalised.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to substantiate and evaluate the efficiency of using e-learning resources in the blended learning format in the process of language teacher training at university.

#### **5. Research Methods**

These are such research methods as class observation, interviews with teachers, questionnaires for school language teachers and students on language teacher training programmes.

#### **6. Findings**

To characterise the features of the educational process in the blended learning format and to justify the expediency of using e-learning resources, we turned to: 1) Russian and foreign studies on the issues under survey; 2) students' evaluations about their experience of studying on the master programme in the field of language education of the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology at Voronezh State university (Russia). The studies of the following Russian authors were considered: S.A. Khudoverdova, E.S. Polat, V.V. Safonova, V.V. Serikov, S.A. Sevastyanova, O.V. Yakovleva and some others. The studies of the following foreign experts were analysed: S. Garton, C. Graham, V.A. Fandei, J. Hofmann, M. Hutz, D. Keegan, P. Larrivée, Th. Raith, R. Tracey, M.A. Warschauer.

There is quite a number of publications and studies about e-learning, however, there can be distinguished various approaches to this phenomenon and its definitions in both official documents and studies (O federalnoy tselevoy programme "Elektronnaya Rossiya (2002-2010 gody)". Postanovlenie Pravitelstva RF ot 28 yanvaria 2002 g. № 65, 2011). In our study, we base on the definition of the European Commission, which describes e-learning as "the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration" (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 2001, p. 2). This form of learning is also in consonance with the competence-based approach in education, where the focus is developing the skills to find necessary information

autonomously, identify the problem and look for the ways to its solution, analyse the knowledge gained critically and then apply it in practice.

Research literature does not present a unified approach to understanding the content of the concept “e-learning resources”. Academics understand them as a synthetic training tool, an information complex used to increase the efficiency of the educational process, an information resource related to facts, knowledge, information, information culture implemented in educational practice (Dochkin et al., 2015; Kuklev, 2010; Sevastianova, 2006).

The concept of “blended learning” is sometimes replaced by “e-learning” or “virtual” learning; however, it always denotes an educational process that has certain characteristics: in the learning process a teacher and learners are in a distance from each other (this is the feature that differentiates blended and traditional learning), and there is always an educational institution whose responsibility is to plan the educational process, design and deliver training materials to students, and provide them with support (this is the feature that differentiates blended learning and self-study) (Keegan, 1996).

Blended learning is a flexible combination of distance and face-to-face learning: it is “the best way to achieve this goal when combining the forms of online and classroom counselling, using online reference materials and self-study” (Fenenko & Bulgakova, 2016, p. 82).

Blended learning allows to combine the important characteristics of traditional face-to-face and distance learning effectively and has a number of essential features. First of all, distance format makes it possible to adapt educational strategies to each student’s needs. The positive factors in this case are the possibility to determine the duration and pace of training independently, to adapt the content and forms of learning to individual educational goals, which contributes to creating individual educational trajectories (Albero & Kaiser, 2009, p. 3-4). Second, a necessarily high degree of learner autonomy, developed emotional stability and self-reliance become integral parts of the efficient performance within the blended format. The negative consequences of excessive learner autonomy can cause cognitive disorientation, negative motivation, and an increased feeling of isolation in the situation when the learning content is structured insufficiently, teacher control is weak, and the possibility to compare one learner’s own results with their peers’ is not provided (Albero & Kaiser, 2009).

The traditional face-to-face stage in the blended learning format is intended to neutralise such negative factors through direct interaction with the teacher and other learners in the classroom. Herewith, however, face-to-face work clumps learners with different levels of development of relevant competencies, thus evoking the feeling of losing the individual nature of learning, student-centred by nature, creating the illusion that all students are “equated to the arithmetic mean” (Albero & Kaiser, 2009). The distance learning stage is aimed to neutralise this negative feeling.

The observation of the existing practices of language teacher training and the analysis we made showed that an increase in the level of pedagogical skills is inconceivable without introducing e-learning resources into the educational process. The purpose of this introduction and use is to intensify the learning process and form students’ special professional competencies.

Despite the indisputable value of existing courses on the basis of ICT of various types, it should be noted that they do not solve all the problems of introducing e-learning resources in language teacher training, namely:

- the method of forming students' information and communication competence in the training process is not developed;

- the conditions of the efficient formation of this competence, as well as methods and techniques relevant to students' age traits, are not determined;

- the procedure to identify the level to which students' information and communication competence and also closely related to it professional linguodidactic competence is formed, remains undeveloped.

In the academic year 2016-2017, at the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology at Voronezh State university, we conducted a survey to study students' attitudes towards the training process organised in the blended learning format. The survey and students' questioning allowed, first, to determine the degree of their awareness of various forms in which classes can be organised, including the blended learning format, and, second, to correlate students' views on the educational reality they were involved in with their needs and intents.

The survey involved 38 first-year students (full-time and part-time) enrolled on the master programme "Teaching languages with the use of online technologies". The students were asked to give their answer to a series of questions aimed to identify their expert assessment of their own awareness of blended learning opportunities and readiness to study in this format in order to master this technology for future professional activities.

The analysis of the questioning results showed that less than half of the respondents (43.3 %) are familiar to the concept of "blended learning" and have some idea of the main characteristics of this training format. At the same time, only 16.7% of the survey participants agree to abandon contact training and transfer classes to the online mode. The students recognise the importance of regular face-to-face classes with teachers and peers in the traditional classroom. At the same time, when conducting their study autonomously, 43.3% of the respondents use various e-learning resources (e-dictionaries and reference books, e-tools to search and verify the information on the internet, etc.), and 70% interact with each other through electronic forums and chats. The majority of the respondents (73.3%) feel definitely positive to having classes in the blended learning format.

Thus, the analysis of the questioning results allows to state that most of the students, although not completely satisfied with the traditional organisation of the learning process, do not have a clear idea of other possibilities for organising the educational process. However, after receiving more information about the nature of blended learning, students stated this form as acceptable and expressed their enthusiasm to study in such format.

The tasks to form a range of professional competencies necessary to perform professional activities effectively, have been set and delivered while implementing the master programme "Teaching languages with the use of online technologies". The programme was developed within the framework of the international Tempus project with Dr. Sue Garton from Aston university (Birmingham, UK), a well-known expert in the field of using new information and communication technologies in language teaching as its chief coordinator, and meets the national and international (European) standards for language teacher training.

The formation of information and communication competence is one of the main tasks of the seven basic modules designed specifically for this programme. Their materials were developed by the international Tempus project participants, and currently all these modules are implemented in the educational process of the master programme, five of them are delivered in the target language (English).

The students' educational activities within each module present an innovative type of training based on the activity approach and the principles of consciousness and freedom of choice – the students are aware of the algorithm for studying the module materials and make an independent choice of micro-goals and the level of mastering the module; all this contributes to their general cultural and professional development.

The essential feature of each module is the combination of students' traditional learning and their autonomous work carried out remotely. The delivery of each module involves combining different ways of presenting learning materials: face-to-face, e-learning and self-study with the use of knowledge management methods and methods of monitoring the level of knowledge deepening.

The content of each module is represented by two educational learning segments, among them tasks for face-to-face and independent distance work. The classroom work is held in the form of students' discussions, presentations, project activities. Each lesson opens with a "spark" presenting an image, or part of an article, or video/audio material, etc. and setting the topic for the preliminary discussion. The knowledge the students already have in connection with the subject under study is actualised, and they focus on the main problems that will be discussed in the framework of the topic. The students' distance work is aimed at searching, processing information and presenting research data in various forms (summaries, essays, presentations, project assignments, etc.). The distance learning also makes possible organising on-line discussions, project pair and group work, creating wiki, taking part in webinars, self- and mutual results assessment, everything supported by the facilities of the university virtual learning environment (VLE) held on the Moodle platform. The evaluation of mastering the module materials is also delivered mainly within the university VLE, and presupposes the students generating their "Professional Pedagogical Portfolio" with the use of e-learning resources.

In addition, the students take part in the virtual workshop of a language teacher. This workshop is actually an e-learning resource in the form of a learning Internet site designed for the students' e-learning support to allow them not to feel tied to the specific time and place of face-to-face work, to have the training materials always at hand, and thus to be able to perform the learning tasks at their convenient time. The work there is characterised by:

- combining universal and copyright methods of work in a VLE;
- organising training based on a modular approach to work in a VLE;
- using the blended learning format based on the combination of traditional forms of face-to-face work in the classroom and e-learning technologies.

The workshop is based on the competence model of language teacher training. The tasks of professional training include not only acquiring professional competencies but also developing personal qualities necessary for successful language teaching; the work within this workshop focuses on developing an active student position aimed at finding and acquiring practical and personal experience.

The workshop is also based on the modular principle (Scherbakova & Chaika, 2015) which allows to organise students' activities in such kinds of their autonomous work as referencing pedagogical and methodological publications accessible online, preparing online presentations, participating in professional forums, etc. The main modules are "Methodics Centre" and "Training Webinar".

"Methodics Centre" is a section of the site aimed at providing students with educational learning materials on the disciplines studied, as well as delivering continuous and final assessment. The content of this section includes work programmes, texts and PowerPoint presentations of lecture materials, training videos, test materials. "Training Webinar" is a section of the site where students post their reports on the topics recommended for studying by teachers or chosen independently.

This virtual workshop also uses the interactive forms of planning, organising and observing language classes, e.g. virtual class observations, tutorials and skills development sessions, role plays and case studying, round-table talks and debates, online sessions on professional issues with partner institutions, etc. In fact, within the framework of the workshop, an interactive project method is implemented. The feedback mechanism to master professional competencies is very important: the students are always asked to give their feedback on the quality of the educational learning materials provided and activities organised in the workshop, from the point of view of their relevance and importance for professional development.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of using e-learning resources in language teacher training were discussed with colleagues from the UK, Germany, France, Uzbekistan Ukraine and Russia in the collective monograph "Training Foreign Language Teachers: European Challenges, Successes and Prospects" (Avram & Larrivé, 2016) written by leading experts in language education. The authors of the monograph are participants of the international Tempus project "Improving the teaching of European languages through the introduction of online technologies in teacher training". The monograph provides readers with the opportunity to compare the experience of language teacher training at universities in the project partner-countries. The training process is considered in two aspects: from the point of view of traditional practices of language teacher training, and also from the point of view of compatibility of the knowledge and skills gained at university with the existing educational reality and the language policy conducted in the country.

In this research, the pedagogical expediency for the use of e-learning resources in language teacher training was proved and the basic conditions of this use were identified (taking into account the features of computer/technology-mediated professional communication, modelling pedagogical situations; students having a reflexive self-assessment position, etc.). This allows to believe that the use of e-learning resources in the blended learning format creates opportunities for the transition "from informational explanatory-illustrative learning systems to developing self-managed learning" (Scherbakova & Chaika, 2015, p. 73). The use of e-learning resources in the educational process at university provides:

- the development of e-learning technologies;
- the organisation of students' autonomous work;

- the development of interactive learning technologies for independent information analysis and self-education;
- the implementation of multimedia technologies to present educational learning materials in the classroom and to organise students' autonomous work interactively.

As a result, students develop the following professional competencies:

- in the subject taught: a specific set of subject and interdisciplinary knowledge (facts, concepts, ideas), necessary and sufficient to implement professional and personal development;
- in the organisation of the information basis of students' activities: skills to process a large amount of information;
- in the possession of pedagogical technologies: readiness to use e-learning resources as a means of constructing a variety of educational and methodological support for the real educational process in order to increase its effectiveness.

Summarising the experience presented, it is necessary to emphasise that using e-learning resources in the educational process of a higher educational institution increases the efficiency of training as this use motivates students to work autonomously on a regular basis.

The specificity of the blended learning format implies the strategy that makes possible to use all its elements or to replace some components partially in accordance with the students' individual needs. In this case, a teacher acts as the organiser of the educational process, creating optimal conditions for the development of students' independence, responsibility, commitment and the increase in the degree of students' autonomy.

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