

METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ORGANIZATION OF TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE BASED ON BLENDED LEARNING AT THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES FOR PEDAGOGICAL STAFF FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS)

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the issue of organization of teaching and learning a foreign language using blended learning model at the professional development courses. The concept of “blended learning” has been determined by analyzing the studies of the scientists in this sphere. A review of information and communication technologies used in blended learning is carried out in order to identify their didactic properties and functions, the use of which can contribute to the most optimal and effective implementation of didactic tasks. An algorithm for constructing a model of blended learning in a foreign language is formulated, the principles of organizing educational material in the professional development courses, methodological principles of organizing the learning process in the form of blended learning are highlighted.

Keywords. Blended learning, professional development, Higher Education Institution, information and communication technology, supportive blended learning model, blended learning substitution model, model of an e-learning consulting center, multimedia, Prezi, Learning Management System.

INTRODUCTION

The ever-increasing volume of information that must be assimilated in order to obtain a high-quality professional education requires the use of new forms of education, which would make it possible to transfer a fairly large flow of knowledge to trainees in a fairly short time, would make it possible to ensure a high level of appropriation by trainees of the studied material and to consolidate it in practice.

The development of modern information and communication technologies makes it possible to create and implement scientific and educational programs at a qualitatively new level, contributes to the formation of a “computer-literate” personality, adapted to life in an information society.

In order to achieve a new, relevant quality of education, it is necessary to introduce new approaches of teaching/learning in education institutions, to develop a non-dogmatic education system, and to build lifelong learning. And blended learning can help with this, the main advantage of which is the formation of a comfortable educational information environment, a communication system that shows all the relevant educational information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of the scientific, educational and pedagogical literature, materials of numerous conference and seminars presentations have shown that at the present stage of development of national education there is no single interpretation of the essence and content of the concept of blended learning, which is also integrated, combined or hybrid. There are many definitions of the concept of blended learning, most of which are descriptive and reflect different understandings of the term. Roger Shank, referred to by Donald Clark in his article “Blended learning”, defines blended learning as the use of more or less e-learning and face-to-face learning [1].

Among Russian researchers, there are two main approaches in the interpretation of this term. The first approach is associated with the understanding of blended learning as “learning realized by embedding face-to-face learning using active learning methods into the structure of a distance learning course” [2].

In this case, the main material is presented within the framework of the distance course, which involves the trainee's independent work, and the consolidation and development of the material takes place in face-to-face classes, implemented using active teaching/learning methods.

The second approach followed by Yu.I. Kapustin, considers blended learning as “a model of using distributed information and educational resources in face-to-face learning using elements of asynchronous and synchronous distance learning” [3]. From a comparison of the above interpretations of the concept, it follows that blended learning presupposes the presence of an invariant component: a combination of face-to-face and distance learning components, presented in different proportions. Taking into account this clarification, we suggest another definition of the concept: blended learning is a combination of face-to-face and distance learning elements, one of which is basic depending on the preferred model. This definition, in our opinion, most accurately reflects the essence of the studied phenomenon, since it fully represents its essential characteristics and possible variations.

The modern educational process is already unthinkable without the widespread use of new, constantly developing information and communication technologies. However, before proceeding to a review of ICTs used in blended learning, it should be noted that their use in pedagogical practice should be substantiated by knowledge of the properties and functions of the technologies being introduced, in order to clearly determine the formulation and solution of which didactic tasks it makes sense to use them, as well as the specifics of the subject.

A number of researchers (E.S. Polat, S.V. Titova, P. Sharma, B. Barrett, etc.) believe that the didactic properties of ICTs are based on their two most important functions – information and communication, and can be manifested at all stages of the educational process.

Below we provide a list of ICTs that can be used in blended learning, presenting a brief description of each of them:

1. **E-mail.** Due to the fact that between sending a letter and receiving a response to it, usually takes some time (several minutes, hours, days, etc.), e-mail refers to an asynchronous form of electronic communication. In the educational process, it is used to organize communication between a trainer and a trainee or a group of trainees, as well as among trainees; for the delivery of teaching/learning materials (printed graphics, audio-, video materials).

2. **Multimedia** means are “interactive means that allow simultaneous operations with stills, images, video films, animated graphic images, text, speech and sound accompaniment” [4].

Multimedia training programs such as multimedia textbooks, information and reference support programs (electronic encyclopedias, dictionaries) are widely used in the teaching/learning process.

Multimedia programs are used at all stages of the teaching/learning process to solve the following tasks:

- presentation of educational material in various forms;
- formation of special skills;
- control and assessment of learning outcomes;
- management of the teaching/learning process;
- organization of individual and group work of trainees.

3. Programs and services for developing presentations

Nowadays there are several software tools for creating and editing presentations. The most famous of these is the Power Point program, which is part of the Microsoft Word suite of programs.

An alternative program of Power Point is an on-line service for developing and editing presentations on-line "Prezi", built on the principle of cloud technologies (<http://www.prezi.com>). A distinctive feature is that the presentation itself is one large virtual table on which the presented objects are located: texts, pictures, videos, objects with flash animation, etc., which the user can zoom in and out, move, group within, resize, arrange in sequence to display, etc. Prezi is used as a platform for presenting information in a linear and non-linear form, as a tool for brainstorming and creating structured presentations.

4. **Internet forum** (from Latin "forum") – an internet application for organizing thematic communication of website visitors, based on Web 1.0 software, and related to the asynchronous form of electronic communication. By accessibility, forums are divided into open, not requiring registration, and closed, with the necessary registration and approval of the forum administrator to participate in a particular topic. In education, forums are used quite widely to organize joint communication between the trainer and trainees in order to discuss teaching/learning material, progress of work, projects, etc. The forum is included in the mandatory set of elements of learning management systems, which once again proves its didactic value.

5. **Chat** is a means of operational exchange of messages over a computer network in real time, as well as software that allows to organize such kind of communication. There are several types of chat: simple chat (text-based), voice chat, audio-video chat.

6. S.V. Titova defined **videoconference** as "a service that allows broadcasting audio and video information over the Internet, uniting different audiences on a bilateral basis" [5]. Video conferencing is used for conferences, meetings, where communication between partners, separated in space and time, takes place in real time.

7. **Learning Management System** is used in educational activities to create, manage and distribute teaching/learning online materials with shared access. The system includes various components, the set of which in different training courses may vary depending on the form of training (blended or distance learning), the goals and objectives of a particular course and the trainer's preferences. The most famous and common learning systems include: MOODLE, ILIAS, aTutor, Blackboard Learning System, etc. (<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/LMS>).

8. **Social service** is “a virtual platform that connects people to networked communities using software, computers, Internet, and network of documents (World Wide Web)”. They serve to set communication between participants, joint search, storage, classification, editing, exchange and discussion of information on the network, for organizing individual or group activities on the network, etc.

9. **Wiki** is one of the asynchronous technologies of the Web 2.0 generation, written using a special wiki markup that allows users to independently change the content of a website using built-in tools. One of the most striking examples of the use of this technology is Wikipedia. The popularity of using wiki in the educational process is due to the fact that technology contributes to the development of skills in searching, structuring and sharing knowledge, and stimulates group work as well.

10. A **blog (weblog)** or an online diary is “a service that allows to keep a personal diary, posts are typically displayed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent post appears first, at the top of the **web** page. [6]. There is a huge number of blogs classified according to such criteria as: genre, authorship, media type, technical basis and content features, each of which has its own audience. The clarity and accessibility of the blog arouses the interest of many researchers, who consider it as a variant of an individual educational space, as well as a tool for administering and organizing the educational process, a platform for discussions and an environment for posting publications on the Internet [6,7].

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Analysis of practical experience of using blended learning in higher education, as well as existing sources on this topic (M.G. Yevdokimova, Yu.I. Kapustin, M.N. Mokhova, A.L. Nazarenko, M.A. Tatarinova, S.V. Titova, I.E. Allen, V.A. Fandei, B. Barrett, J. Bersin, C.J. Bonk, D. Clark, R. Dziuban, R. Garrett) allows us to propose a generalized classification of blended learning models developed based on the following criteria:

1. changing the format of the traditional training course;
2. changing the content of the traditional curriculum;
3. changing in the percentage of the time allotted for face-to-face learning, for independent work and for monitoring the course of the educational process.

Following the above-mentioned criteria, three blended learning models which can be used in the professional development courses have been identified:

1. Supportive blended learning model;
2. Blended Learning Substitution Model;
3. Model of an e-learning consulting center.

Supportive blended learning model

The supportive blended learning model requires a distance learning component to complement the traditional face-to-face learning system. The distance component may include the implementation of individual group or individual tasks in a computer environment, the development of a full-fledged educational dynamic program, etc.

In this model, provided that the distance component is turned on, the course format changes: despite the insufficiently large degree of integration of ICT into the traditional educational process, since traditional face-to-face training prevails, the number of classroom hours remains, but due to the increase in the volume of the studied material through the distance component, it increases the amount of time allotted for independent work.

The trainer gets the opportunity to better control the individual learning process of each trainee (due to feedback, which is an integral part of distance learning in general).

Blended learning substitution model

The substitution model most accurately reflects the essence of blended learning. It assumes full integration of electronic educational resources into the curriculum, due to which the format of the course as a whole changes (separation of material and types of educational activities between distance and face-to-face components, the percentage of each can vary from 30% to 70%).

While maintaining the initial volume of training content, there is a reduction in classroom hours, an increase in the amount of time allotted for independent work.

Face-to-face training provides the introduction into the training course of consultations with a trainer on the most difficult problems arising while learning new material, conducting various kinds of discussions, disputes, role-playing games, working in small groups, performing practical work, defending projects, etc., i.e. such activities that require direct contact of trainees with each other or with the trainer and final control, etc.

The distance component of this model contains an informative module: general information about the course, its goals and objectives, structure, curriculum, class schedule, assignment deadlines, etc., and also includes independent work on searching and processing information on the Internet, implementation of individual creative tasks, work with reference and information materials, communication between trainees, consultations with a trainer, conducting ongoing monitoring (testing) etc.

Model of an e-learning consulting center

In this model, traditional classroom lessons take the form of obligatory face-to-face lessons in the form of consultations, both group and individual, which are conducted in computer labs. In connection with radical changes in the form of training, the roles of the participants in the pedagogical process also change. The trainer becomes a consultant, an adviser engaged in organizing and coordinating the educational process, and not transferring educational information to trainees.

Development of training courses in the form of blended learning or modification (transition from the traditional form of education to blended learning) of existing ones can be carried out both within the framework of a separate course, and within the framework of a single system for transforming all training courses for professional development.

In any case, the development or modernization of such courses should be carried out in accordance with didactic principles, psychological and pedagogical aspects, as well as the conditions for integrating blended learning into the educational process and provide for the sequential passage of several stages inherent in the design of any learning model.

These stages have been identified and described by scientists and researchers within the framework of different theories and concepts [8].

Summarizing the experience gained in this area, it is advisable to identify 5 main stages in the implementation of the concept of a model of blended learning of a foreign language:

- 1) analysis stage;
- 2) the planning stage;

- 3) development stage;
- 4) implementation stage;
- 5) evaluation stage.

The first stage of developing a model of blended learning in a foreign language involves:

1. analysis of the socio-political context of the use of blended learning in the professional development system in general and in linguistic education, in particular, the actual goals and objectives of training.

2. analysis of the characteristics, needs and requests of the target audience, due to the specifics of the learning environment and real experience of learning a foreign language in the past, namely: consideration of the age and individual characteristics of trainees, the initial level of skills and abilities, the level of their general and information culture, motivation for cognitive activity and etc. At this stage, it is possible to recommend conducting diagnostic tests that allow to identify and analyze the above-mentioned features and needs, as well as the use of research methods such as: interviews, conversations, surveys, questionnaires, etc. [9].

3. taking into account the needs of the educational environment, conditioned by objective and subjective factors of its development: the possibility of attracting additional ICT support (moderators and course developers), taking into account the level of computer literacy of the subjects of the educational process and its potential improvement (conducting seminars and trainings on the development of ICT competence) [9].

At the planning stage, the following is carried out:

1. the formulation of the general goals of the course and specific tasks that explain the goal and determine the final result of training.

2. selection of a blended learning model (supportive, substitute, e-learning center model) based on the analysis carried out at the previous stage. For example, when designing a substitute learning model, it is necessary to pay attention to the distribution of hours between the face-to-face and distance components, the definition of goals, sequence and frequency of alternation of blocks in accordance with the specifics of the learning environment and target audience [2, 10].

The next stage of developing a model of blended learning of a foreign language, the most time-consuming and laborious, is associated with the detailed development of the concept. It suggests:

1. content of the course, namely: the formulation of thematic sections, highlighting problems for discussion, defining the lexical and grammatical framework of topics, selecting socio-cultural material, etc.

2. choice of specific methods and techniques, forms of work, types of educational tasks.

3. optimal selection of ICT, due to the methodological expediency of their implementation in the educational process and the real technical capabilities.

4. distribution of training material between face-to-face and distance components.

5. development of the content and forms of current, intermediate and final control, including the definition of parameters and evaluation criteria. In blended learning, all types of control can be carried out in a traditional form, in the classroom in the form of various types of test and control works, project defense, and passing exams. Separate types of intermediate testing and tasks for self-control can be implemented in the distance education.

6. Development of parameters and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the designed model.

The fourth stage is the direct implementation and testing of the designed model of blended learning of a foreign language. This stage implies the integration of the results of the previous stages into the educational process and may consist of the coordination of the learning process,

which involves regular updating of information (distance component), constant feedback, stimulating productive interaction between trainees, removing possible difficulties, etc.

The last stage of the proposed algorithm is associated with the assessment of the pedagogical effectiveness of the designed and used model. The implementation of constant monitoring of the effectiveness of the educational process is the key to the successful implementation of blended learning in the educational process, as it allows to correct and improve the proposed pedagogical model, both during the educational process and after its completion.

Thus, the educational process in the form of blended learning can be represented as the following model (Figure 1):

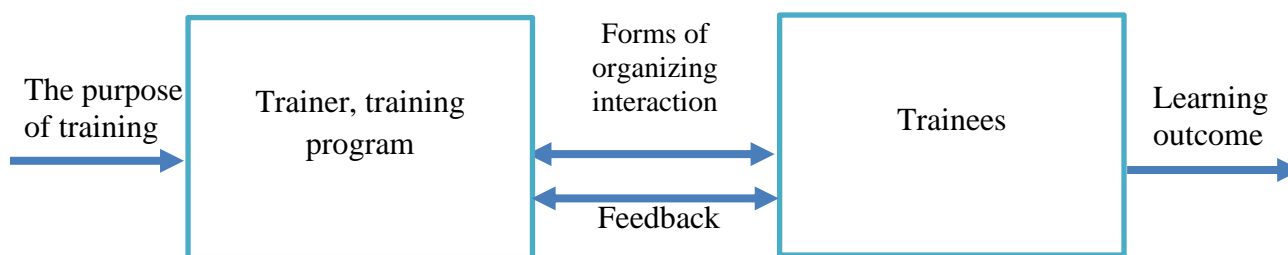


Figure 1. A blended learning model

Despite the fact that evaluation is the last stage in the above-mentioned algorithm, it should not be considered as the end of the process of designing a blended learning model, since the results of this particular stage lead to a revision of the above-mentioned stages of the algorithm. In other words, the planning and organization of this pedagogical model is a cyclical process, where the last stage (assessment) is considered not as the end of the process, but as the starting point of the cycle [11].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the main differences between the design algorithm of a blended learning model from traditional learning can be considered the choice of a blended learning model that is relevant to the goals, objectives and conditions of learning, information and communication technologies as learning tools used in this model, as well as the distribution of educational material, types of learning activities and forms of work between the face-to-face and the distance component. The highlighted concepts can be considered as key ones for the designing or modification of professional development any training course based on the blended learning model.

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