ACADEMIC COMPETITION AS A MONITORING EVENT

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Abstract

The development of society today is characterized by the growing role of information technologies thus we are experiencing a global information revolution that brings significant changes to all spheres of our life: education, economics, politics, etc. The usage of information technologies in education allows to monitor students' studying activities. Conduction of an Academic Competition is one of the forms of realization of qualitative monitoring of students' knowledge and skills.

Realization of the task is achieved through modelling of an Academic Competition in foreign languages in the course management system (CMS) Moodle. The Academic Competition is oriented for the 1-2 courses students of non-linguistic majors. In the course of modelling, introduction and approbation of the Academic Competition the authors use the methods of theoretical research (literature review and synthesis of advanced pedagogical experience in the application of information technologies for foreign language academic competition and empirical research (testing, questioning, methods of information presentation). The analysis of the results is based on the following research methods: cognitive generalizing, diagnostic, experimental and statistical ones.

The authors present the analysis of possibilities of Academic Competitions in education for high-quality monitoring of students' educational activities in foreign languages. Monitoring the results of Academic Competitions is a necessary and important process in the system of high education. This gives an idea of the potential of students, allows to diagnose the perspective of their study and also helps to select gifted students. Academic Competitions contribute to the promotion of scientific knowledge, strengthening the students' motivation.

Keywords: academic competition, monitoring event, Moodle, non-linguistic major.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the knowledge of foreign languages is becoming one of the main criteria and serves as a competitive advantage in employment of modern professionals. Therefore special relevance is acquired by questions of increasing the effectiveness of foreign language teaching. One of the didactic indicators of the effectiveness of teaching in an educational institution is the indicator of the level of training. By definition of the level of students' training, we mean a quantitative description of the degree of mastering the educational material for a certain period of time in accordance with the requirements of the university's curriculum.

The determination of the level of training is possible in the course of monitoring the quality of students' training, the purpose of which is not only to monitor and evaluate educational achievements at a certain period of training but also track the dynamics of academic achievements. In addition, the result of monitoring the quality of education also indicates the effectiveness of the teaching tools used.

The usage of information technology training tools that have huge didactic capabilities, allows monitoring the learning activity of students studying a foreign language, thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of teaching of this subject in the university. Academic Competition is one of the forms of monitoring the quality of knowledge and skills of students.

The aims of Academic Competition are:

- to determine the level of students' knowledge of foreign language;
- to establish the level of communication and linguistic competence of students;
- to identify the most talented and able to study foreign language students;
- to monitor the interest of students to foreign languages;
- to monitor the gaps in knowledge of the subject;
to stimulate the interest and growth of motivation for continuous learning of languages.

2 METHODOLOGY

Participation of students in Academic Competitions in various disciplines, including foreign languages, is an important component of students’ academic work and is aimed at improving the quality of professional training of specialists in higher educational institutions. Unfortunately, the traditional forms of holding academic competitions in foreign languages do not fully meet the modern requirements of professional training of specialists.

We believe that the monitoring of the quality of knowledge and skills of students should be carried out through the use of information technologies. Multimedia technologies are attractive and effective; in addition, they provide new opportunities in varying tasks, problem situations and active usage of different aids [2]. The advantages of the online Academic Competition include the following positive aspects: a combination of several information environments (audio, video, text); unlimited number of participants; work in an individual mode; objective estimation of tasks due to automatic verification.

The realization of the task is achieved through modelling of an Academic Competition in foreign languages in the course management system (CMS) Moodle. The support of the Institute for Open and Distance Education of South Ural State University allows to optimize the procedure for registering, identifying, verifying the work significantly and create comfortable conditions for the participants.

The Academic Competition is oriented for the 1-2 courses students of non-linguistic majors. In the course of modelling, introduction and approbation of the academic competition the authors use the methods of theoretical research (literature review and synthesis of advanced pedagogical experience in the application of information technologies for foreign language Academic Competition and empirical research (testing, questioning, methods of information presentation). The analysis of the results is based on the following research methods: cognitive generalizing, diagnostic, experimental and statistical ones.

3 RESULTS

The Academic Competition called ‘Prometheus’, that has been carried out by the SUSU (Russia, Chelyabinsk) every year since 2013, is considered the heuristic academic one. This type differs from ordinary ones in the fact that it is required to show creative abilities, to move away from templates, to discover something new, and not to demonstrate the known information. Tasks are open and orient participants to identify their own sense of surrounding phenomena, identify patterns or exceptions, and finally, identify self-knowledge. This kind of Academic Competition allows someone to acquire skills, invent, fantasize, create models etc.

The heuristic Academic Competition is not an episodic event, but an equitable form of training, acting as a creative alternative to traditional control and tests and a good monitoring event. The peculiarity of the heuristic form of study is that it involves changing the generally accepted meaning of education. According to the traditional didactic scheme, the student masters the accumulated experience, receives knowledge and only then applies them. As for heuristic Academic Competition it is necessary to note that the increment in theoretical knowledge occurs simultaneously with the acquisition of practical experience, more precisely, with reliance on it. Thanks to this, our educational (monitoring) event contributes to the intensification of the educational process [1].

The order of the Academic Competition is regulated by the decisions made by the Organizing Committee. The Organizing Committee carries out the current management of the preparation and conduct of the event, approves the program and assignments taking into account the educational programs on the foreign language, establishes the procedure for all stages. All students of the first-second courses of SUSU are allowed to participate in the Academic Competition. The Academic Competition ‘Prometheus’ takes place in several stages. The first stage is carried out in the relevant academic disciplines. Since the purpose of teaching the discipline “Foreign Language” is the formation of the communicative competence of students, then the ability to solve communicative tasks must be checked in all types of speech activity. Therefore, the following ones were included in our program:

- lexico-grammatical test, which includes tasks on basic grammatical topics and the knowledge of lexical material at the upper-intermediate level;
- understanding of a written text;
• writing of an essay based on the video;
• creating of a presentation on a given topic.

The performance of the lexico-grammatical test is aimed at testing the knowledge of a foreign language as a complete system. Students should demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of the lexical and grammatical material and the ability to operate with them in conditions of multiple choice. The next task of the first stage of our Academic Competition is the working with the text. Texts should be modern, thematically and socioculturally adequate. Language complexity of texts should correspond to the chosen level of complexity, the task set and the tested skill. Factors that make the text unacceptable for choice include:
- thematic: war, death, racial and religious intolerance;
- age: the topic does not fit the interests of the age group on which the text is oriented;
- linguistic: if the level of language complexity is too high.

Working with the text tests the ability of students to extract the most valuable information. When choosing a video and then writing an essay, we preceded the following points:
• the complexity of the video should correspond to the chosen level of knowledge of a foreign language;
• topics are interesting for students;
• the speaker's speech is clear, the rate of speech is natural;
• the speaker's speech may contain a small number of unfamiliar words, ignorance of which does not hinder understanding of the monologue or dialogue, the fulfillment of tasks on the text and the compilation of an essay.

Working with an essay, the student must demonstrate the ability to write a coherent text for a certain time, to reason, express his/her attitude to the designated topic. It is necessary to pay attention to the correctness of the wording, the formulation should be simple and accessible.

The final stage of the Academic Competition is held face to face, its purpose is to check the level of possession of oral speech. The presentation theme should have a problem-search character and reveal the creative potential of the student. When evaluating students' responses, the following criteria should be considered:
• the relevance of the topic, situation;
• the variety of lexical units and grammatical phenomena used;
• consistency of presentation;
• originality of the presented ideas;
• language correctness.

Over the three years nearly 2000 students took part in the Academic Competition: 732 in 2015, 715 in 2015, 527 in 2017, 12% of students took part in this monitoring event twice. Analysis of the contents of the works from ‘Prometheus’ allows us to state a increase in the level of language competence of the contestants over this period, which is due to more serious language training of students. This allows us to conclude that participation of the ‘Prometheus’ is one of the most effective means of increasing the motivation to learn a foreign language.

Due to the questioning of participants, the reasons why students take part in the foreign language Academic Competition are determined. They are: to test the knowledge, to learn or confirm the level of language proficiency, to communicate in English with students from other faculties; to get additional points for certification/evaluation; to have an objective evaluation as ‘Prometheus’ is computerized’ and to see the results immediately. The questioning revealed the positive assessment of the new form of the Academic Competition by students.

But it is necessary to note some shortcomings of Academic Competitions: the inability to track who does the tasks; plagiarism and technical problems.
4 CONCLUSIONS

Being one of the forms of monitoring of students' quality of knowledge and skills Academic Competition is a serious test of knowledge in a competitive situation, an examination for the concentration, endurance and the will to win. Inclusion of the Academic Competition in a foreign language on the basis of a computer testing system in the overall scheme for monitoring the quality of education at the university allows to reveal more accurately the current level of the students' training in a foreign language, thus increasing the quality of teaching this subject at the university.

In the course of monitoring the quality of studying by students of a foreign language, the level of formation as general educational skills is determined: to use various sources of knowledge, to plan and organize their educational activity, to monitor and adjust its results, etc., and training skills related directly to the specifics of the subject: speaking, writing, reading and skills of pronouncing, lexical and grammatical skills. Monitoring should be systematic and implemented at all stages of training. In accordance with the work programs on foreign languages in non-linguistic faculties

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