TRAINING OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION USING DIDACTIC RESOURCES OF VIRTUAL E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

T. Skorikova, N. Romanova, E. Orlov

Bauman Moscow State Technical University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

Distance learning, which today is considered as an innovation, even in such subject areas, where extensive experience of virtual education has already been accumulated, is marked by a special degree of novelty in the field of teaching Master's disciplines in linguistics. Of particular relevance to research in this direction is the possibility of transferring the communicative activity concept of learning to the practice of distance learning and modeling on this basis a new educational product using online components and introducing them into the teaching process. Informational-educational environment implies the following interrelated components as the main ones: educational resources, educational communication and educational interaction management. According to this approach, we will explore the problem of creating tools of distance support of teaching the «Theory and Practice of Intercultural Communication» course for master students in linguistics of the specialization in “Theory of mass communications and international public relations”.

This article discusses the educational potential of the e-learning virtual environment in teaching the intercultural communication and creating on its basis an online educational course for a master’s program. The aim of the project is to transform the taught course into a distance-learning one with the use of innovative information technologies and to actualize it in the educational process. The online educational course on theory and practice of intercultural communication summarizes knowledge about a language as a real and cultural phenomenon and integrates them into a single system, which has to act as a tool of further professional activity. It contains a flexible system of managing students’ knowledge, which is actualized by the development of an online component for organizing students’ independent work on the studied subject.

The developed course is a range of study and methodic materials, which are specially presented as the static element of the course (printed version of the textbook) and the dynamic element of the course (online component) for organizing students’ independent work in the distance form within virtual educational environment. This online course is integrated into the e-learning environment of the virtual Campus and includes the teacher’s web page with information and reference materials, tasks (individual and group), control tasks and tests, and also the student's web page, which includes the documentation of the educational process, teaching materials, forums, web quests and ways of organizing interaction with the teacher.

Materials, which are presented in the virtual Campus, include: presentation of the leading teacher on the main topics of the lecture course; fragments of video lectures, practical lessons for class- and independent work, tests for evaluating master’s students’ abilities and skills, reference materials for the course, links to the open-access educational resources, current publications on the topics in the media, etc. Virtual Campus tools allow uploading presentations prepared by the students on their own, as well as students’ cooperative creation and editing of text and graphic materials on the topic of educational tasks proposed by the teacher.

Keywords: Theory and practice of intercultural communication, virtual learning environment, master's online educational course.

1 INTRODUCTION

The process of IT development, which is currently conducted in Russia, as well as internationally, makes us see educational methods and techniques from a new angle. With the IT development process we can also define an equally significant process – Web-development of the society and Web-development of education, in particular. Due to the fact that one of the main goals of modern education is the development of students’ abilities of self-education and creative use of the acquired knowledge, it is necessary to find such educational tools, which themselves would be able facilitate new knowledge acquisition after graduation.
The emergence of innovative forms of language education, which, of course, includes distance learning, is promoted by the spread of mass media and open access to a wide information space. Ways of increasing the effectiveness of education are being developed, the pedagogical community is mastering the possibilities of new information technologies and tools, and developing new ways of educational activity on their basis, including open not limited space and time.

In the conditions of IT development there are qualitative changes in the organization of students’ educational activity. The priority in learning goes to designing and developing a new expanded, ICT-saturated and versatile educational environment. A significant part of this environment is constructed by virtual educational environment, which develops and functions on the basis of computer technologies. Technical foundation of this environment is computer networks with well-developed infrastructure and social services, within which the subjects of educational activity are provided with an opportunity to “always be in the classroom”, regardless of the present moment in time and location.

In connection with the development of new information technologies, special attention is paid to the development of skills of scientific and professional communication [1], [2], [3], which corresponds to the concept research education and global trends in the development of education and academic research [4], [5], [6].

Distance learning, which today is considered as an innovation, even in such subject areas, where extensive experience of virtual education has already been accumulated, is marked by a special degree of novelty in the field of teaching Master's disciplines in linguistics. Of particular relevance for research in this direction is the ability to transfer the concept of the communicative method to the practice of distance learning and modeling a new educational product using online components and its subsequent introduction into the educational process.

Informational-educational environment implies the following interrelated components as the main ones: educational resources, educational communication and educational interaction management. According to this approach, we will explore the problem of creating tools of distance support of teaching the «Theory and Practice of Intercultural Communication» course for master students in linguistics of the specialization in “Theory of mass communications and international public relations”.

This article discusses the educational potential of the e-learning virtual environment in teaching the Intercultural Communication and creating on its basis an online educational course for a master’s program.

Scientific and methodic significance of this study project consists in the fact that the developed online course is an innovative representation of the results of methodic and scientific research work of teacher and students. Therefore, it expands their opportunities to participate in the university's innovative activity, along with the educational and research activities.

2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the project is to transform the taught course «Theory and Practice of Intercultural Communication» into a distance-learning one with the use of innovative educational technologies and to actualize it in the educational process.

In order to reach this goal we used the following research methods: systemic approach during the development of ideas about the phenomenon of virtual educational linguistic environment and during its design; theoretical analysis and synthesis in order to generalize literature references, educational electronic resources and instrumental means of developing distance-learning systems; survey and interviews of the students during revealing the priority directions of online course integration into the field of teaching master’s program subjects; expert analytical evaluation of the quality of the created distance-learning course; observation of the students’ speech activity process in real and virtual educational linguistic environment; experimental method in empirical-experimental learning, aimed at evaluating the efficiency of the developed model of the distance-learning master’s course. Using the complex scientific techniques allows providing such parameters of the project, as its innovative nature, viability and distribution of its results.
3 RESULTS

3.1 Theoretical and Methodical Foundations of Creating an Online Course on Intercultural Communication

Distance profile-oriented course on intercultural communication is based on the achievements of linguistics, theory of communication, informational technologies and methods of professional education. Using ICT for developing separate courses gets to a new level. Each teacher, researcher and student gains free access to wide range of information technologies and sources, including new social media, video-conferences services, electronic courses constructors, massive open online courses (MOOCs) and open educational resources. Multitude of the available tools and forms of e-learning allows actualizing innovative potential of teachers and students in the development of online courses and separate online-components. Therefore, each developed online course is an innovative representation of the results of methodical and scientific research work of teachers and students.

3.1.1 The Program of the Developed Course

The development of the discussed course for undergraduates was based on a number of principles: structuring the subject content of the discipline (modular construction), orientation to the practical educational and professional needs of the undergraduate, the presence of constant distance support and the use of a virtual educational environment. In the master's program of the course “Theory and practice of intercultural communication” such approach to the design of the content of the master’s study course is implemented for the first time, which determines its practical significance and methodological value.

The educational program of the course provides: familiarity with the main theoretical approaches to the analysis of intercultural communication; the acquisition of knowledge about the specifics of the cultures of the studied languages, the systems of their values and norms that determine the rules of verbal (speech) and non-verbal behavior of the carriers of these cultures; the formation of cultural susceptibility both in relation to their own cultural characteristics, and in relation to the specifics of other cultures.

The course "Theory and practice of intercultural communication" covers seven topics:

1) Intercultural communication as an interdisciplinary field of humanitarian knowledge; 2) Language and culture; 3) Culture of modern society in intercultural interaction; 4) Methods, forms and means of intercultural communication; 5) The problem of understanding in intercultural communication. Stereotypes of perception; 6) The linguistic identity in intercultural communication. National character through the prism of language; 7) The perception and development of a foreign culture in the process of intercultural communication. The dialogue of cultures [7].

3.1.2 The Formation of Intercultural Competence as the Main Purpose of the Course

Intercultural education is one of the most important areas of linguistic training. The purpose of this course is to teach students the theoretical foundations of intercultural interaction, the formation of intercultural competence, which allows students to carry out adequate communication and language activities in the context of entering into foreign cultural groups. As part of the professional training of undergraduates, along with the development of traditional, well proven approaches to teaching the language of the chosen major, special attention should be paid to teaching students the necessary knowledge and skills to work with information using the latest computer technologies, which helps them to independently update own knowledge in professional Internet communication.

3.2 The structure of Online Educational Course on Intercultural Communication

The organization of a virtual learning environment is considered in the works of A.N. Bogomolov [8], L.A. Dunaeva [9], E.G. Asimov [10], S.B. Bagalieva [11], S.S. Kulikova [12], and other researches [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]. Following these authors, under the virtual educational environment, we understand the e-learning environment based on Internet technologies. Learning resources of a virtual language environment are built on the basis of electronic textbooks and teaching, as well as methodical complexes, which are a "structured information and educational space of an educational institution with all the distance learning courses available in it, provided by the curriculum" [10, p. 195].
The online educational course on theory and practice of intercultural communication summarizes knowledge about a language as a real and cultural phenomenon and integrates them into a single system, which has to act as a tool of further professional activity. It contains a flexible system of managing students’ knowledge, which is actualized by the development of an online component for organizing students’ independent work on the studied subject.

The developed course is a range of study and methodic materials, which are specially presented as the static element of the course (printed version of the textbook) and the dynamic element of the course (online component) for organizing students’ independent work in the distance form within virtual educational environment. This online course is integrated into the e-learning environment of the virtual Campus and includes the teacher’s web page with information and reference materials, tasks (individual and group), control tasks and tests, and also the student's web page, which includes the documentation of the educational process, teaching materials, forums, web quests and ways of organizing interaction with the teacher.

The interactive basis for building the course (the interaction of all its structural elements and online components) is provided by a system of cross-cutting hyperlinks in the structure of the course itself: lecture material > main (key) concepts of the course sections > tests > practical tasks > problem tasks and projects.

3.3 Methodic Organization of the Project's Study Materials

The methodical organization of the project’s study materials includes: developing a course structure with testing interactive and innovative teaching methods and designing the online component of the course in accordance with the competencies that the student should get as a result of the training; preparation of text materials, presentations and necessary graphic objects; creating an online course component and uploading it to the Campus electronic educational environment.

Materials, which are presented in the virtual Campus, include: presentation of the leading teacher on the main topics of the lecture course; fragments of video lectures, practical lessons for class- and independent work, tests for evaluating master’s students’ abilities and skills, reference materials for the course, links to the open-access educational resources, current publications on the topics in the media, etc. Virtual campus tools allow uploading presentations prepared by the students on their own, as well as students’ cooperative creation and editing of text and graphic materials on the topic of educational tasks proposed by the teacher.

Therefore, the anticipated scientific and practical result of the project is the presentation of the online component of the course in the form of Web-site, which includes study materials in the form of presentations, electronic practical lessons, forums for discussing the course parts, teacher’s blog for publishing current scientific information on the course topics and Wiki pages for organizing students’ cooperative project activity.

3.4 Independent Students’ Work in E-learning Environment

The study of the course is built as a joint research activity of a teacher and students seeking answers to topical issues of intercultural communication. In the process of studying modules, undergraduates independently perform various tasks:

- search for materials on problematic issues,
- formulating their own answers in the course of discussions (forums),
- performance of tests and examinations on course topics,
- writing and protection of the course project prepared as a result of linguistic research,
- the study of scientific literature,
- analysis and evaluation of electronic resources on the theory and practice of intercultural communication.

All independent work of graduate students is carried out in an e-learning environment - the virtual Campus, which allows to maintain constant training contact with the teacher, monitor the implementation of tests and other independent tasks during the study of the discipline, create, open, use, save, forward messages and files of various formats, perform the necessary actions in standard
learning situations, find information about their progress in the point-rating system of knowledge assessment.

Undergraduate education is essentially individualized, as it includes not only a professional, but also a scientific component, determined by the interests and needs of undergraduates. That is why in the course of mastering the content of the Theory and Practice of Intercultural Communication discipline, the use of the latest information technologies and the virtual Campus contributes to the effective formation of the entire complex of basic general scientific, research, linguistic, communicative, pragmatic and special competencies of undergraduates determined by the curriculum of the discipline.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The use of smart technologies in mastering the content of the discipline is aimed at developing the professional competence of undergraduates by mastering the main technological approaches to developing their own educational "routes" in the virtual learning environment. The expected result is the formation of the readiness of undergraduates to use knowledge of the theory and practice of intercultural communication in solving educational and professional tasks; willingness to design their own individual educational environment with the help of modern computer technologies.

In the course of studying the theory and practice of intercultural communication, undergraduates become familiar with the basic laws of the global process of informatization of society and education; specific features and educational capabilities of a modern virtual learning environment. In addition, they learn to carry out virtual communication with members of the study group and teacher, use the capabilities of the virtual environment to solve various educational and scientific problems (preparing reports, essays, term papers, etc.), participate in conducting and organizing online discussions (forums) on intercultural communication.

As a result, undergraduates master: the technologies of searching for information on the questions asked by the subject of the course; ways of orientation and interaction with the global Internet resources; technology design their own educational routes using a virtual learning environment. As we see, the virtual educational environment, due to its uniqueness and peculiarities of the organization, leads to an increase in the reflective activity of the subjects of education. The teacher needs to learn how to correctly use the reflexive potential of the network space for the purposeful solution of pedagogical tasks related to the development of the professional competence of the future specialist. Using the potential of the information environment contributes to the formation of special competence – reflexive, which includes the reflexive ability to understand the activities performed, as well as a number of students' reflective skills (focus on the result of the activity, on the process of activity or intermediate results, etc.). For this purpose, it is necessary to use a flexible system for managing the intellectual activity of students using different network models of professionally oriented training.

REFERENCES


