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Multimedia Platform for Improving Language Competence of University Students

The article describes the role of multimedia platforms used currently in the teaching process in formation and improvement of (foreign) language competence. Multimedia platforms are used in organizing not only classroom activities but also developing the mode of autonomous work of higher education institution students. Language competence as well as other competences cited in educational standards of new generation can be improved by using multimedia platforms, including Internet-based ones.

Key words: multimedia platform, language competence, professional competence, autonomous work, information and communicative technologies, assessment tools.

Academic, social and personal as well as professional competences are represented in all educational standards in all countries of the European Higher Education Area (further referred to as EHEA), including the Republic of Belarus, which joined the area in 2015. The new generation

educational standards require compliance of professional qualifications with the above-mentioned competences, although quite often the legal acts in the field of education do not contain description of control measures and actions of acquisition of professional qualities and educational competences cited in educational standards in detail.

Modern higher school is currently transformed with mechanisms ensuring multicultural and multilingual situation, i.e. knowledge of foreign languages is a standing requirement for educational standards in the first and second cycles of higher education. Students in universities have to obtain a lot of general academic and general professional competences, but this is not always reflected in curricula: the requirements to competences are high, but there is no sufficient number of academic hours for acquisition of those competences, and it actually devaluates the very idea of the language competence. When mentioning the language competence, we have to note that we take into account not only foreign languages, but also native tongue(-s). When we speak about a foreign language competence for forming autonomous subjects of the educational process, everything is complicated by determining the level of the foreign language competence, which has been shaped within the general secondary education framework (programs and standards provide learning of the full paradigm of the foreign language at the level of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar, including reading and writing, listening comprehension, etc.).

For achieving the goals of competence acquisition at the first and second cycles of higher education many teachers use information and communicative technologies (further referred to as ICT) during their classes. In Belarus there is a wide experience of applying ICT in foreign language classes, including design of students' autonomous work. Multimedia platforms are included.

In modern methods of teaching foreign languages in higher school a new form of teaching is identified – that is, blended learning, which allows to combine traditional learning (work with students in classrooms) and virtual learning of a foreign language based on network courses, e-resources, including electronic libraries, e-dictionaries, language corpora, methodological and study toolkits. The face-to-face form of teaching and learning of the foreign language is implemented in practice. One more form is practiced alongside: it is a distant form of foreign languages teaching and learning ('teacher-student', 'student-student', 'student-teacher'). Currently the language (linguistic) competence is considered in various aspects, and it is, first of all, related to different levels of command of various languages, including a mother tongue (the official one in the bilingual or multilingual situation in the country).

No doubt, the linguistic competence aims at learning by trainees of new language means in compliance with the topics, spheres and situations of communication, which are selected taking into account the profilization (specialization) of this or that higher education institution. This competence is demanded by the trainees not only for everyday communication, but also for learning scientific and professional information, which they can get from various sources, including the resources on the Internet.

After recognizing the individual approach in education, in general, in learning foreign languages, in particular, we admit it necessary to place in the foreground the organizational function of a teacher and to make foreign languages learning more practice-focused for the student to become an active subject of the training process, who is able to take an active part in acquisition of the language competence.

In methodological references it is often said that only active, autonomous and productive activity of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students is able to ensure acquisition the language and research competences. But it is only the first pre-requisite to the professional competence.

The second mandatory condition is a solution of the issues related to the organization of the training process in the first and second cycles of the educational system of any country in the EHEA, which is impossible without using ICT allowing to optimize the process of acquisition of the language and research competences by the trainees, and that means that the information and communicative technologies help create favorable conditions in terms of time and workload aimed at achieving the positive learning outcomes by the students.

Digitalization is currently becoming a general trend in development of all nations, including the ones in the EHEA, and the steps to digitalize all areas of public life are provided in various legal acts and international conventions related to information security as well.

In modern environment it is hard to imagine an undergraduate or a graduate student coming to classes with a backpack with textbooks and manuals. More often teachers can hear a request, and sometimes it is a requirement, to provide students with all materials in the electronic format because our trainees have laptops, smartphones, tablet computers, etc. Lectures are recorded on smartphones, students take photos of the presentations they are provided with during lectures, the texts are noted down in the Word application. A foreign language teacher can identify the place and role of each gadget in the structure of the training process organization, the sequence of their application and use on the multimedia platform, which provides for using the content of a specific learning

module, depending on the speech or language competence to be developed within the training module.

New multimedia platforms are developed for training specific modules, test options, etc. We can cite the following most popular educational platforms:

1. *Moodle.* Currently it is one of the most popular and widespread systems of e-learning with an open source code (open access). Moodle allows to use various tools, to track students' progress. The system allows to develop courses adapted for Android platforms.

2. *Eliademy*. It is designed for teachers and tutors on a free basis. It provides catalogues of e-learning courses, assessment tools as well as Android applications for the teachers developing mobile courses and aiming at those users who prefer "fast learning".

3. *Dokeos*. This system provides lots of ready-made samples of e-courses and author's tools, which can help you reduce time for development of your own course.

4. *ATutor.* This system of distant learning has lots of useful functions starting from e-mail notifications to file storage options. One of the best advantages is its client focus and easy-to-use interface making this platform an ideal tool for the beginners among developers of e-learning courses.

5. *OLAT.* Assessment tools, social integration and homepage of a trainee are only some of the advantages of this multimedia platform. This system helps you design a time-table, send e-mail messages/ notifications, different options for distant learning and autonomous work of students. This system allows to add new users and develop new comprehensive courses for e-learning environment.

It is known that the complex provides accountability of motivation of trainees, which is ensured by the multimedia support for learning subject areas and adequate performance in doing training speech exercises. At the final (controlling) stage interim and final tests on the multimedia platform are of great importance to avoid subjectivity of the trainees' learning outcomes, to form multi-component tests for checking various aspects of speech activities (phonetics, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening comprehension, grammar), to use different forms of control (in-class and e-learning or distant ones).

When using multimedia framework in acquisition of foreign languages competence the students in the first and second cycles perceive language tasks as individually important assignments, which then allow them to improve the language competence.

Use of multimedia platforms can ensure not only an individual approach to learning foreign languages, but also to monitor the command of foreign languages to avoid the situation where a fresh student (in the first or second

years of university studies) acquires the foreign language competence, but as a senior student (in the third-fifth years of university studies) loses it, though according to the educational standards he/she graduates with excellent knowledge of foreign language in his/her professional area.

Multimedia support certainly requires further implementation and fine-tuning at all levels at universities, including professional development of the teaching staff in the area of using ICT in teaching foreign languages.

Educational Internet-portals play an important role in solving the issue of multimedia support of acquisition of the (foreign) language competence meeting the educational and informational needs, for achieving positive outcomes in learning, research and future professional activities as well as for having the possibility of the information mining, active interaction with the training process participants (chats, forums, Skype-communication, webinars, blogs, etc.). Internet helps teachers not only communicate and interact with their students, but also develop new tools of ensuring autonomous work, including information mining tasks, development of skills required in foreign languages, including translation and interpretation competences, e.g. by using specialized resources in many languages for comparative studies and identification of standard translations.

Organization and management tools in the foreign language acquisition should be presented to students in a comprehensive set for ultimately successful functioning of the training process, which will ensure dynamics in learning and research activities of trainees and which is impossible to do without using information and communicative technologies.

This issue is particularly relevant in the framework of education globalization and promotion of national education systems on e-learning platforms with the view of export of educational services and recognition of national educational certificates according to the Lisbon Convention.