Project Method and ICT Opportunities of Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses opportunities of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and efficiency of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in distance education. The authors suggest that pedagogic organisation of ESP distance learning courses involves three stages – familiarisation, managing one-on-one student interaction, and facilitating group interaction. The authors demonstrate that efficient mediation of the distance learning experience by the teacher implies practising the individual approach, facilitating self-development, self-study, and motivation, and deploying the most effective means to facilitate online interaction and knowledge consolidation. Inter alia, this is achieved by implementing project method to motivate creative thinking and individual work. Efficiency of ESP distance courses was explored based on the LMS-supported distance course intended for people seeking to develop their business English skills. Course efficiency was assessed at two levels – the level of students' reaction to the course and the level of actual knowledge gained upon course completion – with online students revealing a 18,1% higher performance rate.

1. Introduction

In the context of today's information society, teachers find themselves facing a challenging task – the need to train students to obtain and process information using English as a communication and cognition tool. In order to achieve this goal, efficient learning tools are being developed. Such tools allow for increased access to education and a better open education system.

Since English language teachers are actively involved in shaping the competences associated with students' occupational activity, they are expected to obtain, analyse, process, and systemise the information associated with future vocational activity. Addressed in the framework of today's information progress, this task is most efficiently implemented by using information and communication technologies enabling extended access to information and interactive dialogue.

At the present time, the scientific issues associated with ESP teaching are rightly included in the range of critical research challenges faced by a number of humanitarian disciplines, including linguistics. The scientific issue is gaining an ever more profound understanding of the way the English language affects economic, political, social, and cultural processes at the level of both national and international relations. In this respect, a comprehensive analysis of the characteristic features of professional English and the search for ways to harmonise

business communication are extremely important issues to be resolved in the framework of humanitarian research.

Like any other science, pedagogy could not ignore scientific and technological progress. Having accommodated optimisation and informatisation processes, educational methods are now being transformed by the agency of electronic forms of training, which are rightfully viewed as one of the most efficient, promising, and relevant instructional media of the modern age. Therefore, by analysing current trends in promoting the use of ICT in the sphere of English language education for business, we can reconsider and re-evaluate existing approaches to ESP teaching.

ICT has been used to improve educational practices for quite a long time now, mainly by providing a supplementary and complementary option to taught courses and textbooks. ICT has also transformed a long-standing tradition of distance education and is now being used to provide freestanding education programmes designed and run by universities (Brahimi & Sarirete, 2015). This has been made possible by the emergence of new services and the new format of virtual interaction that have prompted a variety of universities to reconfigure their electronic, remote, and open-source courses to offer Web-based training programmes for their students.

In view of the above, the present paper seeks to consider ICT-based distance learning practices intended to impart the required skills of ESP, define the most appropriate distance learning tools, and explore the monitoring procedures that could be implemented to regulate this process. Efficiency of ESP distance courses was explored based on the LMS-supported distance course intended for people seeking to develop their business English skills. Course efficiency was assessed at two levels – the level of students' reaction to the course and the level of actual knowledge gained upon course completion. In general, the study analyses two key issues of ICT-supported ESP distance courses – the new information modes and methods of student adaptation, and control and monitoring procedures intended to supervise over the students' work.

2. Literature Review

The ultimate goal of ESP teaching is to build communicative competence and help students navigate extra-linguistic tasks in the course of verbal and written interaction. This process can be viewed as a specific form of social interaction, arising in the context of communicative exchange between the parties involved. The primary focus of communicative competence is associated with the skills of scientific polemics, as well as writing and reporting on various social topics. This, in turn, facilitates the skills of self-guided search and research work based on the previously acquired reading and listening comprehension skills.

We can infer that vocational education relies upon a competence approach and, thus, implies that a student is expected to not just absorb specific knowledge and skills, but master an array of theoretical and practical experience and expertise. This kind of integrated knowledge is formed based on the most efficient component of distance courses, namely – the ICT component.

Western teaching practices based on the use of ICT appear pretty extensive (Baturay, 2015; Hedberg, 2006; Kerr et al., 2006; Hung, 2016). Although this mode of English language teaching has only been practised for a couple of decades worldwide, it still managed to quickly gain popularity and establish itself as a productive educational tool. Related theoretical issues are explored in the framework of psycho-pedagogical (ex., Kerr et al., 2006; Player-Koro, 2012), methodological (ex., Author et al., 2016; Leask, 2012; Benedek & Molnár, 2014) and information technology studies (ex., Bueno-Alastuey & Kleban, 2016; Jaggars & Xu, 2016).

A compelling need to develop and apply ICT in the educational process arouse in response to the emergence of open educational resources. The idea of freely available educational resources originated in 2001 and was embodied in the so-called Open Educational Resources (OER) promoted by UNESCO and the Hewlett Foundation. UNESCO defines Open Educational Resources (OER) as open access teaching, learning, and research

resources including full-time courses, instructional materials, modules, textbooks, videos, texts, software, and any other media, materials or technology used to provide access to knowledge. According to the definition proposed by the Hewlett Foundation, Open Educational Resources are those 'residing in the public domain or released under an intellectual property license to permit their free use or re-purposing by others' (The Hewlett Foundation, 2016).

The first project to provide open educational resources was called OpenCourseWare, which currently unites over 280 universities, associations, etc. throughout 40 countries worldwide (Open Education Consortium, 2016).

Thus, such resources were intended to provide ample opportunities for students' professional development by offering accessible, customisable, and virtually unconstrained training platforms.

Obviously, the use of similar educational technologies requires appropriate ICT support, which involves close collaboration of English language teachers with ICT specialists. According to Baturay (2015), the key principles determining efficient implementation of ICT are instrumentation of ICT pursuant to educational objectives; comprehensive and consistent organisation; communication-oriented approach; use of computer resources as a tool of cognition; progressive build-up of difficulty; and integrative coherence of all forms of training activities (Baturay, 2015, p. 430-431).

Online training resources essentially fall into two groups: (1) intranet portals of individual universities offering course material to students of specific universities only (Hollands & Tirthali, 2014); and (2) international websites intended for specialist language training and mostly dealing with such forms of verbal activity as reading and listening comprehension, while ignoring speaking, writing and professionally-oriented translation (Jona & Naidu, 2014; Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

These online resources reveal two fundamental shortcomings, which are (a) lack of tasks intended to build a set of competencies; and (b) lack of teacher-student interaction due to the use of automatic monitoring and assessment procedures. These issues appear highly detrimental to the entire process and, most importantly, the end results of the educational activity, and have to be addressed in order to optimise distance learning practices. The solution lies in the development and improvement of vocational courses.

In terms of language training, the aim is to nurture a communicative culture and develop practical communicative skills. Modern teaching tools, such as collaborative learning, project work, ICT and Internet resources help address these objectives in order to implement the learner-centred approach, provide for individualisation and differentiation of instruction in view of students' abilities, inclinations, and levels of proficiency.

Modern English language teaching aids mainly focus on three didactic systems: open education or open classroom, the learning-styles approach, and cooperative or collaborative learning. These facilitate cognitive and speech activity, give an opportunity to perceive and comprehend the new language material, and develop sufficient communicative expertise to cultivate the necessary skills.

Collaborative learning was elaborated by three groups of American teachers: R. Slavin of John Hopkins University; R. Johnson and D. Johnson of the University of Minnesota and A. Aronson of the University of California. The main idea behind this technique is to create conditions for active collaborative learning activity in different educational settings (Slavin, 1989; Aronson et al., 1978; Johnson & Johnson, 1987). In the long run, a variety of methods evolved on the basis of the concept of collaborative learning, which is essentially based on the feedback approach (Kop et al., 2011).

The process of ICT-based distance learning is adaptive in nature and combines three basic components ensuring its efficiency, i.e. material presentation, progress control and feedback support, to impart knowledge and skills by having the students address practical tasks. This ultimate purpose of distance courses requires the integration of knowledge from different subject domains and is, in our opinion, best fulfilled by implementing the

so-called Learning Management System (LMS).

The research questions of the present work are:

- What benefits do ESP distance learning courses provide?
- How is students' individual and group work organised?
- Can traditional methods of ESP teaching be incorporated into distance learning courses?
- How should the effectiveness of teaching ESP through LMS be assessed?

3. Methodology

Research methods include theoretical analysis of international practices and an empirical study evaluating students' progress with experimental groups taking up project-based learning activity.

In teaching a profession-oriented foreign language in a distance format, what comes to the fore (along with the development of professional language competences) is the formation of the personality of a future specialist capable of self-regulation in the field of lifelong learning. This is what a student needs to be taught, while shifting the emphasis from knowledge transfer to the cognitive creative activity.

In teaching foreign language professional communication, the following integrative principles come into the picture: practice-oriented, context-based and problem-based training, orientation towards learner-centred activities, communicative-situational learning, interactivity, the balance of the conscious vs the unconscious, the principle of collective interaction/reflection. In light of this, the leading educational approaches used to implement these principles include learner-centred, communicative and competence-based approaches.

The learner-centred approach implies applying personalized solutions suited for every individual student and sensitive to their psychological and age-specific requirements, as well as the particular patterns of perception, reasoning, memory, character, temperament, inclinations and abilities.

The key purpose of the communicative approach is associated with targeted development of the communicative competence, i.e. the ability to use the language in various settings to achieve communicative goals consistent with the corresponding intentions.

Competence-based approach implies overriding orientation towards the results of education: the shaping of the required general cultural and professional competences, self-determination, socialisation, promotion of individuality and self-actualisation as essential philosophies (Jaber, 2016).

To implement these approaches, a teacher will have to supply more than just knowledge transfer but embrace the bigger perspective and unlock students' potential by applying the means most suited for an individual person involved in the learning process. While this is obviously a complex task, we believe it can be successfully addressed by introducing project work as part of distance learning activity, since project tasks add the interactive component to the learning process and, most importantly, have been found extremely productive in terms of motivation boost.

4. Discussion

A learning management system (LMS) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of educational courses or training programmes (Ellis, 2009). The system is essentially a web application built on the basis of a three-tier architecture. End users (students, teachers, administrators, etc.) interact with the system through a Web browser. The system holds course content and administration in a single user-friendly online learning platform that allows teachers to easily manage classes and track students' progress. One of the greatest advantages of LMS is that it highlights areas of strength and weakness which provides for ongoing performance improvement. What's more, it creates an environment where students

can interact with content, collaborate with other learners and communicate with their teacher outside the classroom. Thus, the University of Cambridge states that through using the CLMS (Cambridge Learning Management System), Anadolu University in Turkey saw a 1418% increase in student participation in only 37 weeks (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

4.1 Presenting course content using LMS

A well-developed LMS ensures efficient material presentation, progress control and feedback support by adapting the system to a number of factors in the framework of two methods of adaptation: microadaptation (adjustment of the next task based on the results of the previous task) and macroadaptation (selection and adjustment of the mode and direction of further knowledge assimilation based on the analysis of student's individual abilities and specific traits). Both methods help ensure progress control and enable the teacher to organise adaptive learning management. Microadapation is primarily associated with progress control, catering for feedback-based interaction and helping organise adaptive learning management.

Progress control in LMS most often takes the form of standardised testing and is supposed to meet the following criteria: standard methods of knowledge assessment; inventory to present the results (the score) in numeric form; quick checking process; adequate monitoring frequency optimised to maintain system adaptive capacity; inventory to conduct mathematical processing of monitoring results and generate statistics reports.

In LMS, the subsystems of material presentation and progress control are included into different logical blocks. This is obvious in case a student is invited to get acquainted with a set of materials (lectures, videos, images) to be further tested for the purposes of progress assessment. This scheme of material presentation and progress control is not applicable within certain subject domains, in particular for the purposes of learning English, since mastering the English language always implies continuous practical training. Theoretical material that could be presented in the form of a lecture is in this case rather scarce, while practical training essentially combines presentation of material and control of progress. Thus, in case of some subject domains, the only possible solution can be seen in the integration of the two subsystems (material presentation and progress control).

In the long run, efficient exploitation of ICT technologies in the framework of LMS reveals a number of advantages.

4.2 Proximity to natural learning.

In LMS, one of the basic conditions for appropriate knowledge assimilation is the proximity of the training procedures to the natural process of teacher-to-student knowledge transfer. Therefore, LMS must simulate a teacher, rather than a textbook.

4.3 Implementation of the adaptation mechanism.

Traditional learning is an adaptive process. The more control is exercised over the student's progress, the more accurate the adaptive mechanism. If each block of the training material contains multiple sources of feedback, the training trajectory is constantly adjusted to take the most optimal shape.

4.4 Student motivation.

With the integrated material presentation and progress control, there is no need to get back to the previously assimilated material and study large amounts of content anew should any gaps or failures occur. The student is notified of any drawbacks right upon task completion and can always review any material for as long as it takes him or her to assimilate the content.

Thus, if material presentation and progress control are implemented through integrated utilisation of ICT and

teacher's feedback, the overall efficiency of LMS increases to consistently cultivate the students' professional competences while comprehensively employing the teacher's professional expertise. If all requirements posed by the subsystems of material presentation and progress control are met, their mutual integration will increase the efficiency of the learning system thus ensuring ongoing development of students' cognitive and communicative activity through individual, vocational, and competence approaches.

4.5 Project method features and potential in ESP teaching

This paper will discuss the opportunities of LMS against the backdrop of the project method that comprehensively reflects the two main principles of the communicative approach to English language teaching: motivation for learning and personal interest. The basic idea behind project method implies that the focus is shifted to students' active mental activity, while the teacher is there to offer support and suggest appropriate training methods and techniques to help students acquire vocational skills and knowledge while solving practical tasks.

Researchers distinguish a number of features of project methods implemented in English language teaching (Hassan, 2007; Hedberg, 2006; Lane, 2008). Pursuant to Lane (2008), a project is supposed to: fall into one of the distinct project classifications; provide for clearly defined output; cater for practical focus; address vocational issues; exercise student-oriented approaches; provide for independent learning activity; furnish a socially marked background of the process; and cover cross-curriculum activities.

Project-based learning holds a high educational potential, since it motivates the students to receive additional knowledge, contributes to the development of social and business competences (planning, searching for information, decision-making, systemic organisation, group discussions, collaboration, presentations, assessment, etc.). Most importantly, project method allows for individual work, which encourages increased motivation, and targets specific practical objectives catering for ostensive representation of performance results. Implemented in the framework of ESP teaching, project method facilitates communication held in the context of real-life scenarios which, certainly, contributes to better assimilation and retention of knowledge.

The use of the project method in teaching a foreign language is to a certain extent due to the specifics of the subject and is characterised by communicative orientation, situational conditionality, integration of knowledge from different areas, the need to select language material for work, etc.

In the modern sense, an educational project is both a task for students, formulated as a problem, their purposeful activity, a form of organizing the interaction of students with the teacher and students among themselves, and the result of the activity as a method of solving the project problem that they found.

Project work is a creative process that implies that the students seek solutions to a specific issue all by themselves or under teacher supervision. This requires creative, communicative, and intellectual skills. To generate ideas, students will have to be able to find multiple solutions to a given issue, hold discussions, listen to partners, defend a point of view, provide arguments, strike compromise, and state their position in a logical and consistent manner. Thus, project method helps develop creative competence as an indicator of communicative mastery of the English language.

In ESP teaching, project method can be applied in the framework of virtually any topic. Project technology blends well with any training tools and can be included in the various activities realised at the stage of practical studies and integrated development of English language communicative competences to support the attained level of proficiency. Project-based assignments can be viewed as an adapting mechanism used to adjust the content of studies to the specific features of the educational situation and students' individual needs.

All of these objectives can be accomplished by a learner-centred approach that affects the choice of training technologies allowing to spotlight students as the focus of the educational process, turn them into active subjects

of teaching, facilitate their interaction with other students, and make the entire learning process a practice-oriented experience.

Project method implies changing the role of the teacher, for it varies at different stages of project planning. The teacher acts as a consultant, assistant, observer, source of information, coordinator who is supposed to not just transfer specific knowledge, but also teach various techniques of knowledge acquisition. To that end, students are introduced to algorithms that can help them solve common tasks, identify problems, look for the ways to address the identified issues, work with information sources, conduct critical text analysis, describe activity results.

Different classifications of the project method can be listed in order to take a closer look at its structural content.

Polat (2000) suggests six basic criteria for projects classification: (1) predominant type of activity involved (research, creative, role games, information, applied projects); (2) content (mono-projects, interdisciplinary projects); (3) distribution scope (local, regional, international projects); (4) number of participants involved (individual, pair, group projects); (5) duration (short-term, medium-term, long-term projects); (6) output (report, album, catalogue, almanac, summary, record, video, exhibition, etc.) (Polat, 2000, p. 6-7).

Haines (1989) also distinguishes information and research projects; survey projects; production projects; performance and organisational projects.

Thus, the content of the project method primarily focuses on practical, vocational, and student-oriented approaches to cater for efficient and creative independent learning activity. Finally, in applying project method, the best way to train and support the student and the teacher is through pedagogic organisation.

Studies have reported inspiring results showing that project tasks introduced to foreign language classes promote mastering of the communicative competence (Baş & Beyhab, 2017). For one thing, in foreign language teaching, language appears as both the goal and the means of learning and, therefore, it is constantly used by students in their project work, both for communication purposes and to create a specific activity product: searching for information, creating texts, etc. Secondly, a prerequisite for the use of the project method is the presentation of the created product, which also takes place in a particular communicative setting (Iwamoto et al., 2016).

One of the main features of project-based learning lies in its orientation towards a specific practical goal – a visual presentation of the result. An important role is given to case studies as part of the project method, since they help develop, renew, intensify and diversify communication between subjects of the educational process with its orientation towards interpersonal interaction. The project method allows students to show independence in choosing a topic, sources of information, the way it is formulated and presented, which in turn prompts increased motivation in their activity (Larmer et al., 2015).

Student research work is a prerequisite for every project. A distinctive feature of the project activity is search for information, which is then processed, comprehended and presented by the project team members. The result of the project is a product that is created by the project team members in the course of solving the problem posed.

Used as part of a foreign language class, the project method provides the opportunity for students to use the language in real-life everyday situations, which noticeably contributes to better assimilation and consolidation of knowledge (Schindler & Eppler, 2003).

Foreign methodologists identify the following features that characterise the project method in teaching profession-oriented English. The project method has: practical professional orientation; a specific goal (Hugerat, 2016). The project method contributes to: students' independent activity; orientation towards a result; socially-driven interaction within the educational process; the realisation of interdisciplinary communications in the learning process (Leat, 2017).

5. **Results**

Pedagogic organisation involves three stages, which are familiarisation, managing one-on-one student interaction, and facilitating group interaction.

5.1 Familiarisation

Familiarisation takes place in two stages – one is course general and the other is course specific. Course general familiarisation is for instructors new to distance teaching and perhaps wary of its value in the teaching-learning process. It may be accomplished through face-to-face training, online webinars, or other means. Institutions sponsoring online training should be prepared to make such training available through seminars or even one-on-one sessions. The key objective of course general familiarisation is to build confidence in the value and management of online training as a viable training pathway either on its own or as part of face-to-face training or follow-up seminars.

Course specific familiarisation is something that can only be done by the teachers themselves. This involves taking the role of the student, going through course enrolment and doing exercises themselves so that they familiarise themselves in detail with how the course works and can begin to view the process through the student's eyes and anticipate the difficulties they might experience (Koseoglu & Koutropoulos, 2016).

There is no substitute for this and it should be an integral part of the training period for online course tutors and managers.

5.2 Managing one-on-one student interaction

Few distance courses are entirely independent of any human tutorial input and indeed best results are invariably gained when distance learning is moderated and enhanced by interaction with a tutor. There are various ways of doing this when using LMS-supported platforms, including personal tutoring, tutor moderation, and progress chasing.

Personal tutoring. An online programme might have an allocation in which course participants have access to an online tutor in case of queries or difficulties. The criteria for selection of tutors is subject and pedagogic knowledge rather than systems management knowledge, and the aim is to provide students enrolled on the course with a 'human' personal contact.

Tutor moderation. Contact might be through phone, email, or social media outlets, such as Skype. It is important to have a total number of hours for student support, overall per tutor rather than per student enrolled, as some students inevitably require more tutorial support than others. There also needs to be in place a standardised contact record, which summarises name of student, date, type, and duration of contact and the advice or action proposals given. This is forwarded to the institution sponsoring the online course and kept on file in case of queries at a later date.

Tutor moderation may also involve reviewing online test results and giving advice as to what needs to be reviewed or how to accelerate progress. It might also involve offering references to outside sources, such as books or online resources that might be helpful to the student's course of study. Once again, it is important to include any references in the contact record in case of future queries.

Progress chasing. This may be done online where tasks or work is to be completed within set times. The system may simply advise the student that work is due or overdue or send an automatic message to say, for example, 'You haven't signed on for a while. If you need help, please contact …'

However, in some cases, a tutor's personal intervention may be helpful in order to motivate the student to continue. Regular online contact by the system, supplemented by occasional personal messages from the tutor, is an important ingredient in maintaining motivation. Failure of motivation is the main reason for course dropout.

5.3 Facilitating group interaction

Another ingredient in student motivation is the opportunity for inter-student interaction online. Online student interaction occurs in a number of ways, including chatrooms, online group assignments, group Skype conversations and WEBEX conferences. Online group communication now offers a powerful channel for students separated by space to talk to each other and see each other.

Chatrooms. Institutionally, where a number of students are enrolled on an online course, it is possible to establish a chatroom where students can post their views, questions and study experiences online. The key to this is that they not only initiate conversations but can also respond to replies and take part in other students' online postings. As long as the facility is available, the tutor's job is to monitor conversation threads from time to time and only intervene where necessary.

Online group assignments. These are more tutor intensive in the sense that the tutor may have to set, or at least approve a topic and decide on the way the assignment should work. The tutor should also be prepared to monitor and chase progress and offer online support where needed. Assignments will be presented live online and recorded, and the tutor will be responsible for marking.

One important means of increasing commitment and updating student knowledge is through Webinars, online lectures followed by a Q&A session. These can be valuable in transmitting 'state of the art' information to support the online programme or to provide additional background information on specific areas of the teaching programme and may be conducted by the tutor, an outside speaker or even one of the students with special knowledge of an industry or environment he or she operates in.

5.4 A case study in ESP and project method implemented through LMS

As business globalises and companies extend their overseas reach, the demand for English is accelerating. However, the demand for English is vocational in its nature. Business managers need to know how to make presentations, run meetings, participate in international projects, work in multinational teams, negotiate, and network in English. This is why we developed MOVE – an LMS-supported distance course intended for business people seeking to develop their business English skills.

MOVE consists of 12 modules taking about 36 hours to complete. Each module is divided into 12 activities, which means that users can study online for as little as 15 minutes to complete an activity. With MOVE, the learning process is based on continuous assessment. Users complete comprehension and practice tasks, and are required to hit a cut score to progress to the next activity. In case of failure, students are given advice on how best to proceed and are encouraged to try again. Those who manage to meet the minimum threshold at the first attempt are also encouraged to try again to see if they can do better. Revision self-tests are offered upon completion of Activities 6 and 11 of each module, so that users could assess their progress and see if there was anything they needed to revise. Presented like this, MOVE demonstrates a fairly standard type of cognitive connectivist approach.

There are four key techniques we have used to apply project method in the framework of MOVE, and these are: (1) objectives and takeaways; (2) action planning; (3) collective thinking (user discussions and tutorial support); and (4) case study.

5.4.1 Objectives and takeaways

At the beginning of the course, users are invited to write down their specific course objectives – what they want to achieve and how this will help their working life and business career. At the end of every module, they check how the module has contributed to the achievement of their objectives by writing the two or three key things they want to remember and one thing they will do to implement what they have learned as a result. This process is called 'Takeaways' (what you take away from your studies and how you will apply it).

5.4.2 Action planning

At the end of each module, we ask our students to complete an action planning form. In this, students state what they will do upon completing their module study and when they will do it. We encourage users to define SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-based).

5.4.3 Collective Thinking

This final Activity 12 of each module brings users together in an online discussion moderated by a tutor to discuss the results of the case study and their performance, and also to raise questions regarding their progress in their studies. In addition, there is a user bulletin board accessible to all users, and this may also form part of the online discussion.

5.5 Case study

This is usually Activity 10 and the climax of the module in which the users deploy the knowledge and skills they have learned in previous activities to complete a business task. This may be based on a specific situation or an article or report for study. Students are assessed on their success in completing the case study.

The project method is implemented as part of the Case Study and employs various tasks suitable for LMS-supported learning platforms. For the purposes of this paper, we shall introduce one of the project tasks presented in Activity 10 of Module 3 'Business Meetings' and describe its specifics in terms of the three components providing for LMS efficiency, namely (a) proximity to natural learning, (b) implementation of the adaptation mechanism, and (c) student motivation.

In the case study called 'Going International', students face a managerial issue that has to be resolved. The background information on the case reads as follows:

ConsultCo is a management consultancy offering services in rationalising and streamlining small- and medium-size enterprises. At the turn of the century, their services were in great demand as companies made efforts to increase productivity and reduce costs. To keep up with demand for their services, ConsultCo grew considerably in the following years. Right now, one of the options for ConsultCo is to find new markets for their services. The company is in an excellent position to offer consultancy services abroad. However, they have no experience of doing business abroad. How does a small consultancy go international? As top manager of ConsultCo, you need to find the ways for the company to go international. After background information is gathered, you consider calling a business meeting to discuss related issues with the staff. You have made appropriate arrangements and held the meeting.

The task is to complete a form which is a general list of meeting proceedings. The form is completed by dragging the QR codes bearing embedded texts and dropping them to the available slots where applicable (Table 1).

Table 1 *Example of MOVE case study task titled 'Going International'*

			Meeting minute
Date:		*Meeting format (type):*	

Starting time:		*No. of participants:*	
Closing time:		*No-shows:*	
Purpose:		*Invited speaker:*	
Venue:		*Agenda item no.1*	
Meeting called by:		*Agenda item no.2*	
Meeting chairman:		*Agenda item no.3*	
Minute Taker:		*Approved action plan:*	
Web page:		*Approved by:*	

5.5.1 Proximity to natural learning.

In case of this project task, proximity to the natural process of teacher-to-student knowledge transfer is ensured through the availability of teacher's support as the student has an opportunity to reach out to the assigned teacher and get advice on how to proceed in completing the task. The teacher is notified immediately upon request submission, and might be available within a short period of time to guide the student through the task.

5.5.2 Implementation of the adaptation mechanism.

Upon completing the task, students get their scores which define their further training trajectories adjusted so as to comply with their progress and needs. This means that whenever the score indicates specific gaps, students are advised to follow certain instructions (review the corresponding material, complete a grammar or vocabulary task, or consult a teacher regarding the gaps indicated) that will ultimately help them eliminate these gaps.

5.5.3 Student motivation.

The student motivation component can be described as an 'after effect' or a kind of pay-off one gets if the first two components are appropriately implemented, for efficiently instrumented learning mechanisms of ESP

training relying on realistic and adaptive course arrangement ensure ongoing development of students' vocational competences, which is the most important motivation stimulus.

5.5.4 Two-tier assessment of MOVE efficiency

Analysing the practices of distance training realised in the University at different levels of the system of life-long education, we can validate the viability of this kind of training. This is confirmed by the results of experimental work that served as an underlying background of the present research. The purpose of the experiment was to introduce the students to the new distance learning course called MOVE to further assess the students' interest in the programme, as well as their performance. In the course of the experiment, a group of students majoring in International Business Relations was divided into control and experimental groups each comprising 11 individuals. The students of the control group were attending classes on a usual basis (they visited face-to-face lectures, did their homework, and took tests), while the participants of the experimental group took the MOVE course in the distance format realised through the University LMS. The content of the course was the same with both groups ensuring fair learning framework. Upon course completion, the efficiency of MOVE was evaluated at two levels – the level of students' reaction to the course, and the level of actual knowledge gained upon course completion.

Level 1: Students' reaction to the course

The evaluative data retrieved at this level relied on the method of survey and helped assess students' satisfaction with the course and the learning process. In this paper, we shall consider a single example of the total of 11 students having offered their responses and evaluations. The method of survey was implemented in the form of questionnaire (written survey) containing a number of questions arranged by content and form. Relying on the method of written survey, we were able to gather information on facts, as well as respondents' opinions, evaluations, and preferences.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections comprising a number of parameters. The students were asked to evaluate these parameters on a scale from 1 (least efficient/adequate) to 10 points (most efficient/adequate).

Section 1. Course content assessment.

This part of the questionnaire included 13 parameters to be assessed by the students: number of tasks; content of tasks; vocational relevance of knowledge and skills obtained; balanced segmentation of course parts (videos, exercises, projects, online discussions); course duration; the amount of time allotted for projects; the amount of time allotted for online discussions; the amount of time allotted for grammar practice; the amount of time allotted for vocabulary practice; the amount of time allotted for speech practice; the amount of time allotted for listening comprehension practice; learning goals achieved; general assessment of the course.

Course content efficiency was further calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{S_1(P_1\ldots+\ldots P_{13})\ldots+\ldots S_{11}(P_1\ldots+P_{13})}{11}$$

where S – student; P – parameter of Section 1 of the questionnaire assessed by each student.

Section 2. Course realisation assessment.

This part of the questionnaire included 6 parameters to be assessed by the students: adequacy and validity of time limits set for tasks; efficiency of knowledge assessment procedures; quality of knowledge assessment; goal-setting efficiency; degree of complexity; attainment of personal goals upon course completion.

Course realisation efficiency was further calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{S_1(P_1\ldots+\ldots P_6)\ldots+\ldots S_{11}(P_1\ldots+P_6)}{11}$$

where S – student; P – parameter of Section 2 of the questionnaire assessed by each student.

Section 3. Teacher's skills assessment.

This part of the questionnaire included 6 parameters to be assessed by the students: knowledge of the subject; organisation of work; teaching style; communication, feedback; ability to create favourable climate; general competency.

Teacher's skills efficiency was further calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{S1(P1\ldots+\ldots P6)\ldots+\ldots S11(P1\ldots+P6)}{11}$$

where S – student;

P – parameter of Section 3 of the questionnaire assessed by each student.

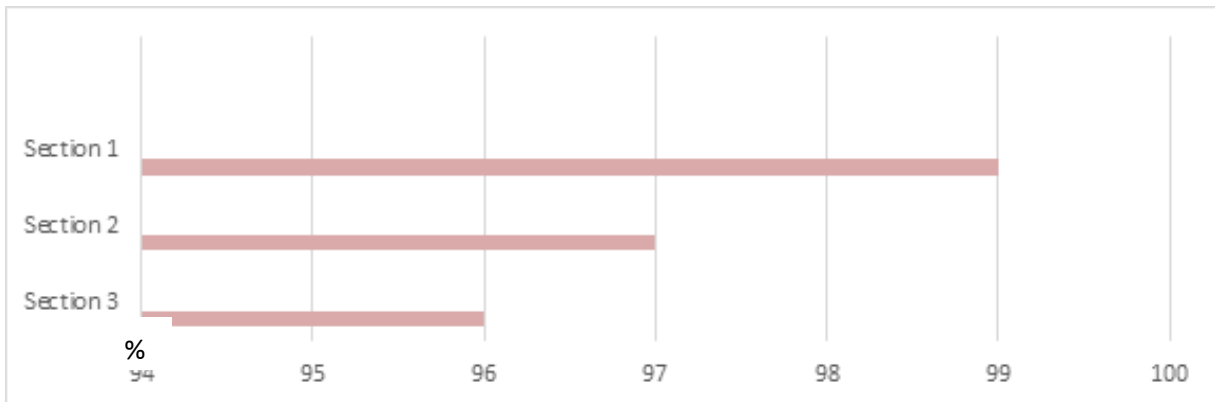The data collected were further summed up section-wise and represented graphically as follows (Figure 1).

Figure 1. MOVE efficiency based on Level 1 assessment procedure

Based on the written survey results, students' reaction to the course reveals the average degree of satisfaction of 97,3%. However, assessment results retrieved at this level are rather subjective, as they only indicate whether the students liked the course in general and do not provide any estimates shedding light on its practical expediency. This is why assessing MOVE efficiency required another level of evaluation.

Level 2. Actual knowledge gained upon course completion

This level of course efficiency assessment involved testing procedures undertaken upon course completion. This type of assessment is implemented universally in educational institutions in the form of credits and examinations to define if the students have obtained the knowledge and skills consistent with the set goals. At this level, students' performance was evaluated by calculating the average of the total points attained. Test results for the control (CG) and experimental groups (EG) are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 *Test results for control and experimental groups based on Level 2 assessment procedure*

| | Points (max = 150) | |
	CG	EG
Student 1	110	120
Student 2	90	110
Student 3	98	122
Student 4	105	124
Student 5	104	131
Student 6	105	139
Student 7	99	129
Student 8	102	125
Student 9	119	125
Student 10	102	132
Student 11	100	139
Average:	**103,09**	**126,9**

The average total for CG and EG are 103,09 and 126,9 points, respectively, with the EG students revealing a 18,1% higher performance rate. The results were also broken down activity-wise to illustrate students' success rate in completing grammar, vocabulary, listening comprehension, speech, project, and collective thinking tasks (Figure 2).
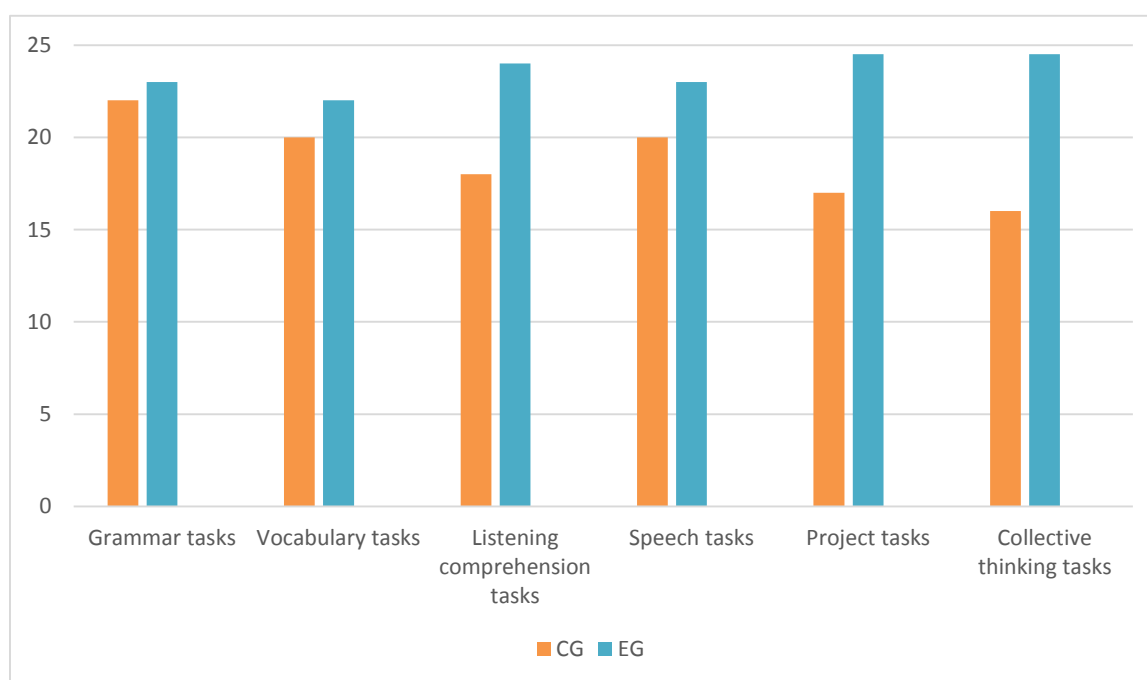

Figure 2. *Control and experimental groups success rates in completing grammar, vocabulary, listening comprehension, speech, project, and collective thinking tasks*

The test method allowed us to determine the level of maturity of the set of participants' competences with EG students revealing consistently higher success rates across all of the course components.

6. Conclusion

The present paper aimed to address and analyse the fundamental principles, methods and technologies behind distance learning systems viewed as a powerful educational instrument catering for the individual approach, practical efficiency and economic viability, and reorganised for lack of time and location limitations. In particular,

the study aimed to explore ICT opportunities in remote ESP teaching and highlight the role of project method applied in the framework of LMS-supported distance courses as an efficient tool of knowledge transfer and skill consolidation.

Assuming that vocational education essentially relies on a competence approach and calls for the development of a set of theoretical and practical skills, such integrated knowledge is best formed on the basis of the ICT. Analysing the ICT component of distance learning, the present study distinguished seven key principles determining the efficiency of its implementation and identified two major aspects catering for a more productive distance learning experience, i.e. a combination of material presentation and progress control.

Since one of the primary goals of distant courses is associated with better coherence with the traditional pattern of knowledge transfer, it is also suggested that such projects are supposed to evolve through the development of their adaptive capacity. More importantly, the issue comes down to ensuring better feedback capacity to foster teacher-to-student communication and promote a motivated learning process. It is also assumed that the principle of individualisation should be considered the backbone of distance courses.

The three fundamental approaches realised in distance training (individual, vocational and competence approaches) serve the ultimate purpose of distance courses, which is integration of knowledge from different subject domains. This, in turn, is best fulfilled by applying the project method: its content primarily focuses on practical, vocational, and student-oriented approaches to cater for efficient and creative independent learning activity.

The process of distance training is essentially administered through pedagogic organisation, which comprises three stages: familiarisation, managing one-on-one student interaction, and facilitating group interaction. Analysis of the pedagogical organisation of distance learning practices demonstrates that efficient mediation of the distance learning experience by the teacher implies practising the individual approach, facilitating self-development, self-study, and motivation, and deploying the most effective means to facilitate online interaction and knowledge consolidation. This is achieved by implementing project method to motivate creative thinking and individual work.

Efficiency of ESP distance courses was explored based on LMS-supported distance course intended for people seeking to develop their business English skills. Course efficiency was assessed at two levels – the level of students' reaction to the course and the level of actual knowledge gained upon course completion – with 'online' students revealing a 18,1% higher performance rate.

Generally, the study illustrates some of the key issues associated with ICT-supported ESP distance courses.

The first issue on the agenda is the issue of new information modes and methods of student adaptation. It is important for the students to become motivated participants of the process, active supporters of informational training, ready to develop their own personalities and harmonise their psychophysical morphology.

The second issue is the deficiency or lack of control and monitoring procedures intended to supervise over the students' work. We needed to develop the methods that could promote the students' learning capacity, kindle their interest in the matter, and ensure easier and more comfortable perception and storage of material studied. Besides, while modern distance courses do need to simulate the process of natural knowledge transfer, their diversification potential is something we need to take advantage of to avoid the occasional dullness one may sometimes encounter in the classroom. Bringing contemporary technical aids can make the process more engaging, thus motivating students to get involved. For example, QR codes can turn a cliché drag-and-drop task into an amusing game.

Thus, informatisation of education and development of new information technologies brings about a brand-new educational system functioning within universities worldwide.

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