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IT and Internet resources in English language learning at university

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Flexible learning is a widely used term, but nowadays its definition goes beyond the idea of distance learning. It is "a movement away from a situation in which key decisions about learning dimensions are made in advance by the instructor or institution, towards a situation where the learner has a range of options from which to choose with respect to key dimensions" [1]. Opportunity to learn something new is now available to any person, who has access to the Internet. The new upcoming system of education does not apply any restrictions: courses can be studied by any person of any age in any country.

The work is based on two researches: the first one is a primary research held amongst students at Lomonosov Moscow State University (Faculty of Journalism). The other one is based on the results of the first one, and it analyses possible innovations at university, which would help students to improve their language skills. Through the work it was also shown that besides benefits that language students will experience, suggested innovations would help to organize educational process on a higher level.

The primary research was held amongst 35 students. Unsurprisingly, all students now have access to the Internet. Sixty seven per cent (see picture # 1) admitted that use it for more than 7 hours a week, and seventeen per cent that they spend between 3 to 7 hours a week. More than eighty per cent of students (see picture # 2) would be interested in watching and/or reading lectures in English at world-leading universities. Also more than 70 per cent (see picture # 3) think that they will benefit from these innovative approaches. Also results suggest that Internet resources are not used on a proper level (see picture # 4), and there is a gap between students' expectations and the actual situation.

The second part of the work is devoted to analysis of steps required in order to improve the situation. These were divided into two major categories: global and local steps.

Firstly, the global approach requires universities to implement WWW-based applications, which will extend flexibility. Within six major pedagogical categories (course organization, lectures, self-study, assignments, testing and communication) it was analyzed how WWW-based applications can improve productivity, effectiveness and therefore underlying results. As an example, course organization and lectures include course calendar and lectures notes, which are both available online. This will help to organize any course effectively, and motivate students to devote more time to studying. Also learning outcomes will be better, as there will be a possibility to re-listen lectures as many times as required. Another example is based on opportunities to create tests and set assignments (under category "testing"), which will help students to check their progress, see live results and areas that have to be improved. Suggested WWW-based application for implementation is Moodle, which is a leading course management system (CMS) used in 218 countries by 66,601 teaching organizations [3]. Secondly, 4E Model was used to analyze factors that affect students' use of technology

and must be considered while building IT system. 4E Model suggests that four main factors: Environment, Education effectiveness, Ease of use and Engagement play a crucial role in this process. Using this model, it was shown that learning efficiency will increase, and in the long-term pay-off will include tangible benefits as well.

But besides global innovations, which are time-consuming and require strict management, there are some local approaches, which can be taken by any lecturer, based on Open Educational Recourses (OER). Four major OER, which can help students to improve their language skills, are suggested. Importantly, all of them are completely free of charge.

- MIT Open CourseWare [4]: is one of the largest resources available for free. It includes courses in thirty-six subjects, from Politics and Biology to Media Arts and Urban studies. Lectures are available in PDF files and videos. Any student can find something, which is particularly interesting for him. The usage of these resources improves writing and listening skills, as well as expands students' vocabulary in a certain field

- OpenLearn by Open University [5]: the idea behind this web service is similar to MIT's one. The aim of this site was to motivate "greater involvement in higher education by under-represented groups" [2]. But the sources are useful for language students, as give opportunities to learn and enhance vocabulary in different areas on a basic level

- iTunes U [6]: is one of the most powerful educational tools ever created. It combines the video lectures from mostly all top-rated university, including Stanford, MIT and Harvard. The lectures will help language students to develop their listening skills

- LSBF's MBA [7]: nowadays mostly everyone interacts through social networks, and universities started to use social platforms to deliver educational resources. London School of Business and Finance uploaded the whole MBA (Master of Business Administration) course on Facebook. At the end of the course a student with the necessary requirements will be able to take the exams, and upon the successful completion receives MBA diploma

As a conclusion, it was shown that there is a gap between students' expectations and current situation at the university. Suggested OER will make students able to study at their own pace, improve language skills and learn necessary vocabulary in particular fields. Better awareness of existing open educational resources will lead to higher students' motivation and involvement. In the work there are practical suggestions, which in the long run will help students to enhance their skills and also improve effectiveness of current system of education.

Литература

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7. LSBF Global MBA http://www.facebook.com/LSBFGlobalMBA
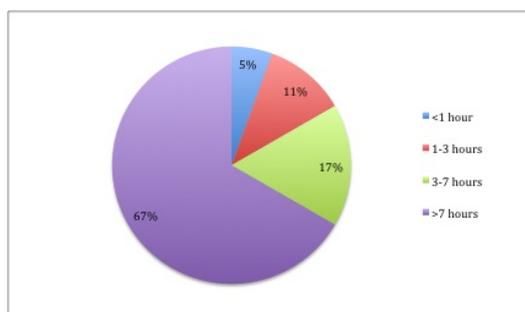
Иллюстрации

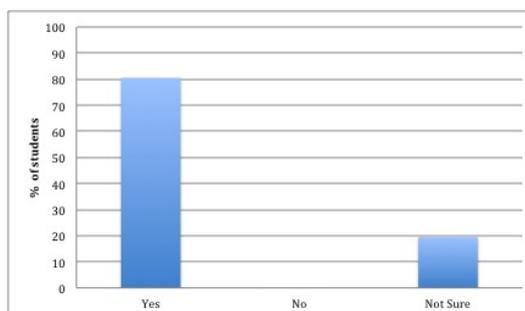Рис. 1: Time spent online

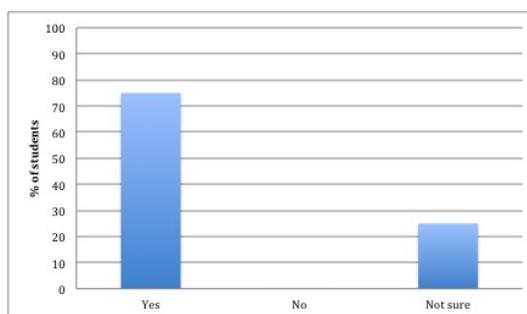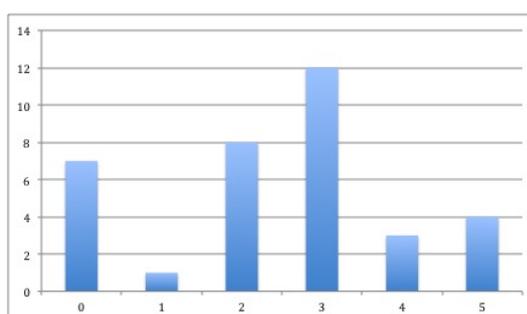Рис. 2: Willingness to study online

Рис. 3: Usefulness of innovative approaches

Рис. 4: Usage of web services at university