

Digital Educational Resources as a Component of Linguistic Environment Basis for ESP Blended Learning

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Abstract. The augmentation of ESP state of the art and benchmarking, as an instrument of improving the quality of college students training, has become the basis for the report. The attempt to find out and analyze the hindering obstacles on the way of this process and search for efficient boosters of its improvement has resulted in singling out such component of ESP teaching and learning linguistic environment as students' individual work in the college resource centre (CRS). The aim of the report deals with the principal factors of the arrangement, and, in particular, its 'saturation' with self-study materials. The first results of the search resulted in a substantial change of teaching/learning paradigm at the college with its shift towards virtual educational reality which caused purposeful reconsideration of class-room teaching techniques, profound alterations in selection and use of individual self-paced learning materials in CRC. The conclusions of a semester-long experience are inspiring though it is obvious that more objective criteria of control and assessment of students' progress in mastering ESP competences are required urgently.

Introduction

The augmentation of ESP state of the art and benchmarking as an instrument of improving the quality of college students training has become the natural basis for this report that touches upon the application of digital educational resources as the basis for the implementation of college students' self-study process or individual work component aimed at improvement of ESP teaching and learning linguistic environment.

Dealing with the ESP working tools and essentials of ESP technique we relied upon the pioneering work by Waters and Hutchinson [1] as well as recent achievements stated in Ross's work [2]. More profound clarification and systematization of the existing confusion in numerous abbreviations, encoding almost similar approaches to English teaching in the last 20 years can be found in our latest work [3].

The latest tendencies in this sphere have demonstrated world-wide the modification of traditional educational paradigms, including English teaching ones. We have witnessed the implementation of **ESP methodology**, **CLIL**, **blended learning**, shift of teacher-centred to **student-centred approach** in teaching, introduction of educational technologies in the **Internet** and open access to **digital educational resources**.

Research Backgrounds

The rationale of the issue in question is almost equal or similar at all national network of secondary vocational institutions in the field of the English language proficiency. Our college freshmen come to the college with different academic backgrounds. They also have different potential and motivation. So our task is to provide the students of both lower proficiency and greater learning potential with equal opportunities among those who had better school-leaving test results. In addition to low level of adaptation of college students for mastering foreign language habits and skills due to the above reasons (no matter what it deals with: GE or ESP or EOP), we

have to admit that our classes are rather numerous. That means our college students are less competitive at the start of education compared to the students of West European or North American colleges. The conditions of study there are more favourable since the teacher-student ratio is 1: 12, 1:10 or even 1:5. Therefore, in order to raise the efficacy of the language acquisition, the first and foremost requirement for GE or EOP teacher is the possession of profound competences and teaching techniques of arranging educational processes in the most effective way that could bring competitive results for students' use of practical language skills in their future work.

Brief Review of Terminology and Available Approaches

Now, prior to describing the offered approaches aimed at elimination of the above difficulties and improvement of EOP teaching and learning technique, we'll clarify the general notions to be used by us in the instruction. 'Independent study' or 'self-study' process have always been the most generalized terms of independent learning realized by an individual without teacher's supervision, just by a learner oneself, using various resources one could have an access to. Then, at the end of the last century, we have received one more notion of the so-called 'blended learning'. In result, a number of definitions of numerous type of education have appeared which either duplicate each other in some way, or slightly differ. Among the most traditional and long-livers are 'full-time', 'part-time' and 'extra-mural' types.

We have chosen 'blended learning' principles for our EOP model students' learning as the most appropriate for our argumentation. As is known, blended learning combines multiple types of media, i.e. class-room learning under the guidance of a teacher and individual use of digital educational resources. Thus, we can say it's a combination of class-room based learning and self-paced e-learning. The frequent occurrence of the second notion in didactic media proves that educational process is more and more transferred into virtual educational reality.

All of them could comprise a few approaches in their arrangement concerning the place and time of learning (class-based vs. out-of-class, distant learning), degree of guidance (under curriculum or instructor); on-line learning under the teacher's supervision vs. off-line, delayed in time due to student's time selection priorities; ratio of a teacher to students' number (teacher-class/group, face-to-face).

On the other hand, very transparent notions have entered our practice showing the principles of curriculum arrangement, depending on the degree of autonomy of a student: in-class programs vs. self-paced learning; kinds of materials used for learning: fundamental teaching/learning series sets containing Teacher's Book, Student's Book, Work Book, Audio and Video Cassettes, published by well-known OUP, COP, Pearson-Longman publishing houses, developed for different levels, like Beginner's, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Advanced, etc.

College Resource Centre Arrangement Tasks

Great contribution for the improvement of English language is offered by the digital educational resources (DER). They comprise limitless amount of various teaching and learning media, based on the software and contained in virtual course text-books, language laboratories, on-line virtual classes, electronic libraries, educational portals. All this is to be thoroughly analyzed and taken into consideration while implementing the improvements of blended learning into educational process. It has been frequently postulated that to make the process more efficient, a teacher of GE or ESP has to possess profound competences and teaching techniques of arranging educational processes in the most effective way that could bring competitive results for students' application of practical language skills in their future work.

But ESP teachers are not trained in compliance with specialized programs at our universities and colleges so far. GE teachers are facing hardships to be overcome before they acquire necessary proficiency in students' occupational competences. DER can help to alleviate these hardships. This is on the part of a teacher. But, on the part of a student, we cannot offer a better approach than to setting technologically equipped College Resource Centre (CRC), working out criteria for selection

of materials for students' effective learning, 'saturating' it with minimum required hard- and software, and arranging its operation control of self-study or independent self-paced learning. Hopefully, it will bridge the above-indicated gaps and enhance the effectiveness of classroom work through providing students with an access to resources which will enable to foster academic skills, and make it possible to integrate into the world-wide professional community. Being complemented with students' individual work in the CRC, it will provide real conditions to customize students' autonomous study skills in the context of life-long learning. Moreover, the efficiency of blended learning technology is to be greatly stipulated due to the time deficit of class-room work, the increase of academic hours allocated for students' self-study and mainly, owing to the change of the roles of a student and a teacher.

To arrange full-fledged work of such a centre we have to obtain answers to the following questions: what types of hardware we need for its operation (number of working places, computers, headphones, etc.), which software is to be installed, what learning materials are to be provided, and, finally, how students' supervision on the side of the teachers would be arranged. Today, there are enormous literary sources on how to arrange and operate such a CRC on the basis of existing experience. Therefore, the solution of all these problems can be considered as an organizational aspect of SRC operation. However its 'saturation' with learning materials has not been thoroughly analyzed yet. So we have to focus on the research and assessment of DER for the use by the college students. As is known, one of the principal requirements for selection of ESP learning materials is the use of authentic literature. And what can these 'authenticity' mean in relation to CRC materials and their use in blended learning process?

Requirements for Authentic Materials Selection

The college 'beginners' with lower level of GE proficiency and, practically, complete lack of professional competence can be easily demotivated by the use authentic materials. Therefore, our strategies present a certain compromise between restrictions imposed upon those materials which cause serious difficulties in understanding, on the one hand, and, on the other, choosing teaching/learning materials, that are, principally 'unauthentic', intended to eliminate these difficulties.

In written texts they frequently occur in letters/e-mails, case-studies, instructions, manuals, specifications, agreements, reports, surveys comprising irrelevant vocabulary, or abound in outdated information. In spoken English they are multiple time-fillers, false starts, dialect and accent features that hinder understanding, multiple abbreviations in ads, directions, warnings, signposts and notions, belonging to peculiar cultural background, etc. Finally, we can state here that by no means we refuse to get involved in selection of traditional teaching materials since they serve as a powerful instrument for our students in eliminating the drawbacks of GE acquisition and mastering anticipated professional competences faster.

DER Description for GE and ESP Purposes

Let us address now the practical examples regarding the process of selecting both kind of CRC materials discussed so far. See below the samples of learning resources comparative review in compliance with the four kinds of English speech manifestations (auditing, speaking, reading, writing) with special references to vocabulary and grammar mastering resources.

[BBC-LearningEnglish](#) is one of the oldest (March, 2008) and well-known resources of audio materials for acquisition of **auditing** skills. [Watch and Listen](#) section comprises 6-minute podcasts of English accompanied with scripts, explanations of words and phrases from the broadcast program as well as references to the articles of similar content.

British Council LearnEnglish site also comprises pages with podcasts: [LearnEnglish-podcasts](#). In [Elementary Podcasts](#) learning materials are thoroughly selected and ready for self-study. The accompanying exercises can be done on-line as well as downloaded into your Support Pack.

Professional Podcasts are devoted to ESP learners. In addition to [learnerenglish-podcasts-professionals-archive](#) one can find here audio texts on various occupations.

BusinessEnglishPod.com is a site for mastering Business English with a great number of podcasts. It is updated once a week.

[Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab](#) contains the materials distributed according to the levels of complexity. An opportunity of assessing (in percentage) the level of perception is anticipated. Useful similar resources are also referred to.

[Daily ESL: Conversation Starters for English Students](#). This resource is devoted to everyday English for beginners. Scripts for materials are also supplied.

[TrainYourAccent](#): ESL Accent Reduction Training and Conversational American English Practice helps to verbalize learner's thoughts naturally.

[Learn English for Free with ello!](#) Interviews with people from various parts of the planet are collected here. Each week the site is expanded with various new materials.

[Listening Lessons – 5 Minute English](#) is provided with explanations of set expressions and tests.

[ESL Fast](#) resource comprises 365 short stories with additional exercises. It is designed for beginners and pre-intermediate levels and has a section in audition and oral practice check-up section.

[1-Language.com](#) is a multifunctional sight containing such sections as Learn English, Practice Writing, Take a Quiz and Audio Courses. It offers 50 podcasts for mastering English for Academic purposes. But the amount of materials is rather limited.

[LibriVox](#) audio books recorded with high quality by mother-tongue volunteers can be easily downloaded.

In [GetYourNewFictionFreeEbooks, Books and Audiobooks](#) one can hear spoken AE in new audio books on urgent issues, complemented with cartoons and sound effects. It is recommended for beginners.

[Listening | EnglishClub](#) comprises a lot of English language audition. Materials and exercises on various topics, such as podcasts, news blocks, poems. It also contains a section where dictations are placed with checking of spelling and punctuation.

Sites [examenglish.com](#) and [GIST Guide](#) are aimed for preparations for international examinations (TOEFL, IELTS PET, FCE, CEFR, KET) and they comprise sections for audition with exercises.

[EngListening](#) is a resource for only listening and writing down arranged in three levels of complexity: beginners, intermediate and advanced.

Most materials of the above resources belong to teaching ones, but a certain amount of their audio content falls into authentic resource classification as they were borrowed from communicative practice of native speakers.

Speaking competences are mainly aimed at creation of communicative competence in English. [ESLgold.com](#) provides the user with clichés and set phrases for conversations. [SpokenSkills](#) is a resource devoted wholly to forming the habits of English speaking. One can exercise speaking activities comprising the information starting with individual phonemes and ending with speaking competence mastering in General English, English for Specific Purposes, Business English, etc. The site also contains special section of Self-Study Quizzes and materials for self-study.

ICQ, Skype, Twitter, blogging and other social network technologies present a powerful resource to be widely used for mastering students' speaking skills.

[LearnEnglish](#) site, referred to above, can be effectively used for acquiring and mastering **Reading** habits and skills. They are comprehensively presented here and have an elaborated structure and scheme of work with texts: before reading a text one can get customized with new lexis and then read the text. All the texts are supplied with exercises.

CNN World News (<http://cnn.com>), another useful resource for improving reading competence, is undoubtedly referred to as an authentic material. Interaction of readers with editorial board is available within the framework of DISCUSSION heading, which has its MESSAGE BOARD, CHAT and FEEDBACK.

Resource [EnglishWell.org](#) is arranged in the form of a library. The site allows students to master communication skills in **writing** with maximum effect and demonstrates how to communicate in multiple 'English-speaking' forums and chats through the media of Internet.

The above heading division of resources would be incomplete without materials for mastering such aspects of English as **grammar** and **lexis**. MyStudy.ru essentially comprises the information and exercises on English grammar where the information on all basic structures is presented. <http://english-grammar.biz/> is a generalized portal for mastering grammar and lexis. In addition to it there are sections for acquisition of Business English, tests and on-line dictionary. Сайт <http://www.engvid.com/> is presented in the form of a video. Here one can choose grammar, lexis and other actual topics, as well as the level of proficiency from 'beginner' to 'advanced'.

With the help of Learning English Online (www.englisch-hilfen.de/en) and Learn English (www.learnenglish.de) the students can master English grammar. Such site as [Native English](#) is a useful English grammar manual.

There are multipurpose or **universal** sites aimed at mastering all kinds of English speech manifestations. A typical example of a universal means is [Learning English Blog](#) made by BBC. Live language, popular topics and mini dictionaries are comprised in each post. The blog contains the following sections: News, Sport, Shop, TV and Radio.

[ABA English: Learn English Online - English School](#) is a course of English comprising 144 sections for 6 different levels. Each part is preceded by an introductory film and all sections include various spheres of English that will assist to develop all four habits and skills: audition, speaking, reading and writing.

Conclusions

In conclusion we can state that in traditional instructive educational system the teacher's task was to transfer knowledge in compliance with a syllabus. But a contemporary educational system puts forward the structural approach where the new knowledge is created through interaction of information coming from outside with the knowledge already available in students' minds. This is an important provision as it illuminates the necessity of the next step of research: to develop qualitatively new resources with heuristic elements that will improve ESP students' competences and meet the final standards for college graduates in the field of mastering and practical applications of English in professional environment.

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