

Review – Online Approach towards Effective E-learning and Teaching: Challenges in Designing Digital Content

ŠTEFČÍK, JOZEF A VEZJAK, SUZANA. *Online Approach towards Effective E-learning and Teaching: Challenges in Designing Digital Content*. Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2021, [86 s.]. Medienpädagogik und Mediendidaktik: Schriftenreihe, Band 30. ISBN 978-3-339-12182-0.

The coronavirus has brought many challenges in all areas of our lives. Some needed to be dealt with on an ad hoc basis, others required planning and well-chosen tactics, while others did not require as much effort if one was prepared for them. And it is this last possibility that may raise the question of whether it was and is possible to prepare for something like the pandemic and its consequences. If we were to evaluate the situation from the perspective of education, readiness depended on the dexterity with which the members of this department reacted to the altered form of education due to the emergency situation. In the field of education, it was necessary to ensure the continuity of education, and thus to quickly adapt to the online environment in which teaching began. If some teachers had past experience with distance learning, they now have had the opportunity to apply it; those who have so far taught only in person, have had the opportunity not only to try such a way of teaching, but also to contribute to the full use of its potential. Given that the 21st century, thanks to rapid innovation, offers us a number of platforms for the implementation of distance learning, and a wide range of online and digital tools is available, the access to them was not a major problem. However, what could create obstacles in their use was the absence of experience with operating them, more precisely with the use of all functions of the tool so that it is fully used in order to meet the stated goal of education. Another criterion for ensuring quality online teaching was, of course, content, i.e. so that teachers and students have access to learning materials in a virtual form. By converting the content into a format or creating it in a format that fits into the virtual environment, teachers have, so to speak, expanded the functionality of digital learning tools. In order to be able to evaluate whether the specific tool they work with is appropriate and fulfills the set purpose, a number of other factors, in addition to the above, influenced the nature of the subject taught or the required learning outcomes. However, the criterion was mainly time.

The authors of the peer-reviewed publication *Online Approach towards Effective E-learning and Teaching: Challenges in Designing Digital Content*, Jozef Štefčík and Suzana Vezjak, teachers at the Faculty of Applied Languages at the University of Economics in Bratislava, have not only theoretical knowledge, but also practical experience with online teaching which are valuable not only in terms of time horizon, but also the diversity of methods used. They have transformed their know-how – gained through conducting virtual seminars – into material that is

a valuable tool for all teachers, regardless of whether they are starting with online teaching or have already implemented it.

In the introduction, the authors deal with the characteristics of web-seminars, taking the specific circumstances under which they take place into account. They point out that the training of teachers in this case may differ and will require more time and adjusting the structure of the seminar. They also list the forms of online teaching and possible complications that the teacher has to deal with, providing plenty of advice on how to improve the organization of seminars. Specific tips are also part of the following chapter 2.4., in which they recommend specific activating methods that can be used by the teacher regardless of the type of subject taught.

The next part of the publication, chapter 2.5., deals with the creation of teaching materials using reference tools and the cloud as a practical repository of large amounts of data – even in this case the authors are very specific. Moreover, the reader can find information on instructions how to use these tools. They conclude the second chapter with a more extensive elaboration of the principles of online teaching. They truly have set out key principles that the educator should always keep in mind; we would like to highlight: the immediacy, the involvement of all participants in online learning, the strengthening of teamwork, prompt response from the teacher and the methods of assessment. The credo for success should be the fulfillment of two conditions, one on the part of the teacher – always pursuing the goal of education, and one on the part of the student – to be not only “online”, but also “present”, i.e. alert and actively involved in online teaching.

The third chapter is an overview of the most useful platforms and tools for educational purposes. What we consider to be very beneficial is the fact that the authors pay attention to their advantages, but also point out their shortcomings or limits. This way, the teacher will be able to better prepare for a web-seminar using the selected platform.

The fourth chapter is an extremely valuable conclusion of this publication. It contains examples of subjects that Vezjak and Štefčík taught online, and therefore serves as a reliable source of objective evaluation of the online tools used. The authors state the goals, number of students in the circle, conditions of completion and describe the course of teaching through combinations of various virtual tools for individual subjects. The way in which several modern virtual tools are used simultaneously reflects their effort to make full use of these tools and to stimulate students to achieve favourable results, but never at the expense of systematic and well-arranged seminars. On the contrary, the synchronization of different types of tools creates space for setting the content of the subject so that it meets all the set goals of teaching and learning. We consider the presented teaching models to be an excellent inspiration for other teachers.

The publication *Online Approach towards Effective E-learning and Teaching: Challenges in Designing Digital Content* is actually a statement of how important it is for a teacher to be fully acquainted with all the functions of available online platforms and various digital tools to ensure effective online education. It would be more than a success for teachers to consider digital and online tools not only as a necessity during distance learning, but also as a possibility during full-time teaching. There could be doubts about educational outcomes of virtual seminars. However, we believe that being aware of the benefits of digital tools and knowing how to compensate for their weaknesses will help to improve the quality of education. This publication is a valuable contribution to the topic of e-learning and we see its contribution mainly in the fact that the authors share their current experience through detailed descriptions of methodical approaches which can be used as templates by colleagues also from other fields of study.

Dominika Vargová

Author

Mgr. Dominika Vargová, Ph.D., Faculty of Applied Languages of the University of Economics in Bratislava, e-mail: dominika.vargova@euba.sk

The author is a graduate of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. Since 2016 she has been working as an assistant professor at the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies at the Faculty of Applied Languages of the University of Economics in Bratislava. She gives lectures on translation studies and teaches seminars on translation, interpreting and academic writing. In her research, she focuses on the practice of translation and interpreting, the dynamics of changes in this profession in the current conditions of the academic and market environment. In her professional publications, she focuses mainly on the didactics of teaching translation and interpreting.