sional tutor support should favour the development of responsible attitude to study, motivation and time management.

6. Conclusion

Implementation of blended learning approach influences all the components of the learning process, the forms and organization methods, activation, intensification and efficacy of the learning process. New tendencies in higher education system lead to reconsidering teacher's role and position; they assume special features in the conditions of blended learning. Blended learning demands transformation of a traditional teacher into a tutor, who becomes more a coordinator or mentor but not a direct source of knowledge and information. The tutor of the blended course stimulates student's ability to self-knowledge and self-perfection.

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Popova A. N., student
National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University
E-mail: flipflop@mail.ru

Krasnova T. I., senior lecturer
National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University
E-mail: krasnova@tpu.ru

Попова А. Н., Краснова Т. И.

РОЛЬ ТЬЮТОРА В ОНЛАЙН КУРСАХ

Рост использования информационно-коммуникационных технологий в образовании требует критического анализа и пересмотра подходов, используемых для поддержки образовательной деятельности в онлайн среде. Данная работа рассматривает особую роль тьютора, который поддерживает и сопровождает учебный процесс в онлайн курсе, дополняющем традиционное контактное обучение в смешанной модели обучения. В основе данного исследования лежит анализ студенческого восприятия роли тьютора. Результаты исследования показывают, что профессиональная и успешная деятельность тьютора помогает повысить эффективность обучения и способствует пониманию личной ответственности студентов за результаты обучения.

Ключевые слова: *смешанное обучение, электронное обучение, онлайн курс, тьютор.*

Попова А. Н., студент
Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет
E-mail: flipflop@mail.ru

Краснова Т. И., старший преподаватель
Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет
E-mail: krasnova@tpu.ru

Sobol A. V., Krasnova T. I.

USING WIKIS FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' ONLINE COLLABORATION

Web 2.0 technologies offer new opportunities for their integration into the instructional settings. Such element of Web 2.0 as a wikiis seen as communication and collaboration tool that is often used in online courses to engage students in learning foreign languages. The paper suggests strategies for implementing wikis in order to enhance students' collaboration in online courses. The analyzed wiki activities show that the participants of the online course are ready for effective online collaboration and quite aware of their roles.

1. Introduction

At the time when education faces unprecedented challenges international academic community recognizes the fact that the transfer to information society is impossible without integration of e-learning technologies into the educational process. These technologies orient learners to a contemporary educational mode promoting their knowledge and skills development for lifelong learning and personal development during a lifetime.

There is no doubt that higher education in Russia is changing and these changes are inevitable if we want to respond the demands of the society. The flexibility of education with a student-centered approach has become a leading idea now. The European agenda for the modernization of higher education recognizes flexible learning and delivery methods as a means to improve quality and relevance of higher education while expanding student numbers, widening participation to diverse groups of learners and combating drop-out.

Educators are constantly experimenting on using information and communication technologies in many innovative ways. They are sure to benefit from the obvious advantages that technologies provide for teaching and learning. Nowadays there is a great interest in Web 2.0 technologies and its potential for use in educational environment of online courses.

2. Background

We will talk about online courses in the context of blended learning which is quite a hot topic today. The online course here is a part of the main course along with face-to-face contact and other supporting activities. In Russian higher education sphere blended learning is a relatively new phenomenon but a lot of universities put in place a number of initiatives to support this technology and integrate in the educational process. The aim of these initiatives is to facilitate learning, teaching and research by providing ICT tools and making it easy to access digital learning resources [1].

Many researchers believe that only a blended solution, which suggests a balanced proportion of online and traditional study, can give satisfactory outcomes. The emphasis is usually made on supplementing class contact time and providing enhanced opportunities to supporting a wide diversity of students' needs [2].

Blended courses are usually designed on the basis of Learning Management Systems (LMS). National Research Tomsk Polytechnic university chose Moodle as their main LMS because it is the most accessible and effective tutorial; on the basis of this platform very engaging online tasks can be created. Moodle is designed and continue being improved to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalized learning environments [3].

Foreign language teachers highly appreciated Moodle as a teaching tool for a blended learning course. Moodle offers flexible and dynamic management of the learning process and satisfies new needs with regard to methodology and information technologies. Moodle makes it possible to create individualized process of learning where students can interact with each other and teachers, which encourages their close collaboration [4]. Students can study outside classes at any convenient time thereby increasing education efficacy.

Moodle has a lot of elements that have useful applications in foreign language teaching, for example:

- assignment (can be used for translation, text reference, gap-filling, and transformation exercises, writing essays and letters, etc.);
- glossary (gives opportunity to create a glossary of lexical units, terms, quotations, etc.);
- lesson/lecture (intended for step-by-step study of a topic);
- forum (can be used for group discussions and communication with a tutor);
- quiz test (allows creating a question bank used for continuous and final assessment);
- wiki (can be used for creating collaborative group projects where all participants have rights to edit a common text).

The last element, the wiki, is of great interest for us. The role of the wiki can be defined as knowledge collaboration, contribution, storage, and sharing or exchange of information. In this study we tried to figure out if wikis could enhance online collaboration and positively affect students' attitudes to group work.

3. Wiki as a collaboration tool

Collaboration is seen as an important life skill and also it is a significant factor for academic achievement, student satisfaction and personal development. Collaboration is the main feature of future work environment and should be reflected in authentic activities thoroughly designed by educators. Such activities promote fast solving of difficult cognitive tasks and better understanding and adoption of new material. The main features of collaboration are purposefulness, aspiration for the common goal, motivation, interest, integrity, participants' interconnection, efficient distribution of roles, functions and duties, conformity, low conflict level, self-discipline, ability to achieve the result. But as it was mentioned earlier collaboration is not an end in itself; it is used to help students acquire knowledge and skills, communication experience and social activity. When students recognize themselves as part of a team and understand that common success depends on their individual efforts and contribution, their attitude and position change they have to show initiative and self-sufficiency.

Not long ago collaboration was possible only in the classroom but now Moodle creates collaborative learning environment where wikis become a main form of asynchronous communication. With the help of the wiki tool educators can create various collaborative writing activities, which provide speed of updating, ease of editing and col-

laboration, and overall simplicity. Wikis enhance the communication process by becoming the vehicle for sharing information, building on other students' knowledge base, and collaborating on new ideas [5].

How exactly do wikis work in Moodle? Every page in the wiki has a link at the top 'Edit', when you click it you can write your ideas in a box. Using the editing toolbar students can do some basic formatting of the text, add pictures and media. There is one more important feature of wiki, by clicking 'History' link you can track the changes that were made and see who made a contribution. History list makes it possible to revert to a previous version if somebody vandalized the wiki or erased something by mistake. The link 'Comments' can be used as a tool for discussions. Even files can be uploaded if needed. Fig. 1 shows how a typical wiki in Moodle looks like.

Fig. 1. Typical wiki structure

Contributing to a wiki for the first time must be just as nerve wracking for students as the first forum contribution. Students may need some encouragement to get started, particularly if the tool is unfamiliar. They can be even shocked at the beginning that somebody can change their writing.

4. Educational applications of wikis

One of the best uses of wikis can be a library of resources both for students and educators. It could serve as a warehouse for different sources, links, media, instructions and other information necessary for the course. Everyone can contribute to this collection. Students can share interesting web sites, photos, videos; wikis can become a repository for class-made podcasts or instructions for assignments.

Another type of collaboration is a reciprocal wiki, which invites student participation in completing a task, making lists, collecting documentation, brainstorming and exchanging ideas [5]. Wikis can become a workshop for group projects or arrange collaborative writing activities. The main advantage of such wikis is that in wiki environments, learners participate in their own learning rather than passively receive it. They are actively engaged in the learning process and this can result in greater learning outcomes.

The third type of wikis can be called student-produced wikis. These wikis can be compared with easy websites created by students for sharing their reflections, ideas and opinions; students can create their own vocabulary lists, create polls for other students.

5. Wikis in «General English Blended Course»

«General English Blended Course» is used in the Institute of Cybernetics in Tomsk Polytechnic University for undergraduate students. Participants of the course often work together in group projects in forms of reciprocal wikis. Usually these are not time-consuming activities and they have very creative nature. The asynchronous nature of wikis provides the flexibility for students so they can participate at any convenient time but the students have to stick to the deadlines for wiki submissions. For successful completion of the task students should have easy and precise directions how to perform a wiki, that is why each wiki has a detailed instruction.

Each module of the course contains wikis. Sometimes these are just 'mini-wiki tasks', for example to compare healthy and unhealthy lifestyles and describe the effects each lifestyle has on person's health (Fig. 2). This wiki is done in form of a table, which should be filled by students.
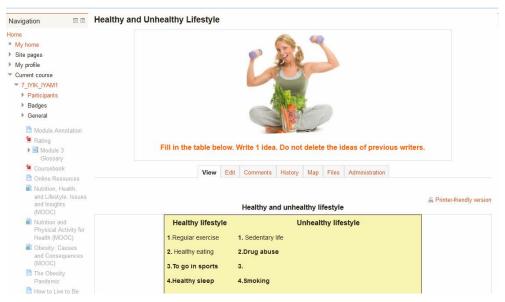
Fig. 2. Healthy and unhealthy lifestyle wiki

A problem-solving wiki was presented in the activity «Packing a suitcase» (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Packing a suitcase wiki

The problem was the following:

You are a teacher in Zimbabwe. Your partner disappears and is later found murdered. Your name appears in a newspaper article listing suspected subversives. Later you receive a letter threatening your life for your alleged political activity. You decide you must flee. Pack your bag: you can only take five categories of things and only what you can carry. List what you would take. Each student should write 5 categories of things or just items.

Performing this task, students had a lot of fun; this becomes obvious from the entries they had. A typical suitcase contained money, documents, food, clothes and a telephone, but some very imaginative students took fake documents, father's gun, a dynamite belt, a bulletproof vest, a wig, a little teddy bear, a make-up bag, a first aid kit and even an epic black hat.

Another activity was designed to promote collaborative story writing. According to the task of the wiki the students should write a story together (Fig. 4).They had only one sentence generated by the tutor with which the story began.

Fig. 4. Collaborative story writing wiki

Each student had to write only one sentence but in fact some of them wrote more and even returned several times to give new contributions to the story. The story had lots of plot twists and students read this wiki on a regular basis to keep track of the story. When the wiki closed students wanted to know the end of the story and asked the tutor to open it again.

Inappropriate content can be the problem when students post a wiki. This happened in a wiki called 'Hobbies'. The students had to write the ideas about acceptable and unacceptable hobbies. When they ran out of ideas they started writing quite strange things like committing suicides as a hobby. In this case moderator or tutor should stop this, and use the possibility to delete the inappropriate messages.

The overall results of using wikis in the online course are encouraging; most students see wikis as a valuable collaborative tool.

6. Conclusion

When wikis are integrated in the online course they can be a great motivator to students' learning and can develop their potential for learning. The collaborative environment that wikis facilitate can teach students much how to work together, how to create a community, and how to operate in the world where the creation of knowledge and information is becoming a group effort [6].

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Sobol A. V., student
National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University
E-mail: u3aya-san@mail.ru

Krasnova T. I., senior lecturer
National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University
E-mail: krasnova@tpu.ru

Соболь А. В., Краснова Т. И.

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ВИКИ ДЛЯ УСИЛЕНИЯ ОНЛАЙН ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ

Технологии Веб 2.0 открывают новые возможности для их интеграции в сфере образования. Такой элемент Веб 2.0, как вики, считается инструментом сотрудничества и коммуникации и часто используется в онлайн курсах для того, чтобы увлечь студентов изучением иностранных языков. Данная работа предлагает стратегии применения вики с целью улучшения совместной работы студентов в рамках онлайн курсов. Проанализированные задания вики показывают, что участники онлайн курса готовы к эффективному сотрудничеству в сети и четко осознают свои роли.

Ключевые слова: *смешанное обучение, Moodle, онлайн курс, вики.*

Соболь А. В., студент
Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет
E-mail: u3aya-san@mail.ru

Krasnova T. I., senior lecturer
National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University
E-mail: krasnova@tpu.ru

Vanjushin I. S., Krasnova T. I.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ONLINE COURSES

Technology is constantly evolving in more sophisticated forms giving new opportunities for educators to transfer learning into virtual space. New educational technology trends are associated today with blended learning where traditional methods of teaching merge with online sessions. Blended learning with its learner-centered approach has a potential to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Russian higher institutions embrace this technology as a strategy to engage and motivate students and thereby augment the learning process. The paper studies students' engagement and satisfaction with the online courses and their overall perception from learners' perspective. The findings could serve as a reference point to promote online courses and to achieve considerable educational benefits.

Keywords: *blended learning, Moodle, online course, student satisfaction.*

1. Introduction

Advancement in technology predestines not only the country economy but has a great impact on education as well. A paradigm shift is needed towards appropriate implementation of technology tools to enhance teaching quality and augment the learning process. Within the scope of the new paradigm students shouldn't be only given some extent of knowledge, they should be taught different ways of thinking, developing creativity, finding new solutions without assistance, performing well in standard and nonstandard situations. E-learning technologies transform ordinary transfer of knowledge into cooperative learning, help to bring together the positions of instructors and students, activate their creative potential [1]. The most popular e-learning technology, capable of solving multiple tasks, is blended learning which is often thought as a way how both educators and students can meet their teaching and learning needs. This technology is profoundly transforming education, training and learning, while engaging and motivating students all over the world [2].

Widespread integration of blended learning is evident and long expected in Russia. A rapid rise of blended learning is derived from the desire to make use of new technology trends in educational context. Blended learning takes the best from two forms of teaching combining effective face-to-face teaching techniques with online interactive collaboration. The authorities of National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU) launched a campaign for integrating blended learning in all academic disciplines. Foreign language teachers were among the first who started using blended learning method to create their courses and increase students' outcomes.

The online course content is usually exposed via an online platform, in our case Moodle, providing not only resources storage but interaction between the participants and even the development of learning community. Students access learning materials and assignments from any convenient place and at any convenient time. Online course is easy to use and has a wide range of activities to make the process of learning a language entertaining while still offering intensive practice.

2. Online course characteristics in blended learning model

Learning foreign languages constitutes an invaluable part of an educational curriculum at TPU. In order to graduate from the University with a Bachelor's degree, students need to study a foreign language for three years. Language courses at TPU are often accompanied with online self-regulated practice based on a Moodle platform. Moodle is a Learning Management System (LMS) and is one of the most effective learning tools for educational institutions as it helps create engaging online language learning activities. Moodle supports a learning model where a tutor acts as a course moderator. An online course on Moodle provides an individual approach to each student by creating a virtual environment for group collaboration.