CHALLENGES OF E-LEARNING AND EFL ONLINE TEACHING

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The latest development in Computer Sciences and ICT that lead to design of various electronic tools and instruments to be used in online learning have found their implications in e-learning, which is gaining more and more popularity for distance teaching and learning. This paper is focused on capabilities of e-learning EFL and the challenges EFL teachers may face at the stage of introducing them in the university teaching/learning process. It is based on the experiential learning of the authour at different online courses and constructive knowledge got from the online learning at the E-Moderator Essentials course provided by the British Council.

E-learning can be defined as the delivery of a learning, training or education program by electronic means. E-learning involves the use of a computer or electronic device, including mobile phones, in some way to provide educational and learning or training material (Dereck Stockley, 2003). It also comprises various forms of electronically supported learning and teaching activities, where the specific media is information and communication systems.

E-learning or online learning can found its implications at the EFL university courses:

- as a part of classroom activities organised and controlled by the teacher (also known as blended learning);
- for self-study controlled by the teacher, who plays the role of e-moderator and control all the activities done by students, using e-tools of the Moodle/site, including statistics and information given in Grades and Activity reports;
- for individual self-study and autonomous learning, using the Internet resources and the sites, where grades are put automatically by the machine without teacher's participation;
- for testing language proficiency of students using Exercises and Quizzes designed by the teacher/administrator;

- for further professional development both of teachers and students using various online learning sites.

On the way of introducing these innovations in EFL teaching/learning process there is a number of challenges. The most crucial one is understanding of virtual learning environment (VLE) that differs greatly from face-to-face learning environment the majority of teachers are familiar with. On the contrary with real life communication and interaction within learners and teacher in the classroom, in VLE students and teachers interact with e-resources provided by teacher and software of the site in addition to intrapersonal interaction mentioned above. The other problem is being at a distance, i.e. absence of body-language, mimes, eye-contact etc., which contribute much to the success of face-to-face communication. The key challenge to e-learning as "learning and teaching facilitated online through network technologies (Garrison & Anderson, 2003)" is to encourage participation of students and their interaction with peers and teacher while being at a distance.

Lurking, which is according to the latest research is the main challenge for students and teachers, is the other problem to be solved. Lurkers are defined as 'the silent majority' in a electronic forum, those who post occasionally or not at all, but is known to read the group's postings regularly (The online Jargon Dictionary, 2001). The statistics shows that 90% of users of various e-learning sites are lurkers and only 1% participate a lot (Jakob Nielsen, 2006). The question how to 'delurk' lurkers and how to evaluate their online learning are still open.

Though EFL teachers have the majority of skills necessary for e-teaching and e-learning to be a success, there are some specific skills they need to develop to be able to moderate EFL learning online: online communication (social) skills, organisational skills necessary to organise VLE, facilitate learning by observing, evaluating and intervening, time management. Technical skills are seen as the potential challenge for language teachers.

The enhanced technical skills will contribute to effective interaction online with the interface of the Moodle/site and make it possible to design resources and materials to be used in EFL online learning.

Тези доповіді **«Challenges of E-learning and EFL Online Teaching”,** опубліковані в Збірнику **Проблеми і перспективи інноваційного розвитку економіки України:** Матеріаліи науково-практичній конференці, 2 - 4 червня 2011 р., м. Дніпропетровськ/ редколегія: О.І. Амоша (та інш.): у 2 т. – Д.: Національний гірничий університет, 2011. Т.2. – 213 с., сс. 158 – 160.