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The Use of Learning Management System projects for teaching a foreign language in the university

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Abstract

The rapid penetration of web-based technologies into our social life creates challenges both for teachers and students to face. The purpose of the paper to dwell upon the implementation of social media as web-based technologies into the educational environment in the university. Social media application is considered at macro and micro levels within the university structure. Particular attention is paid to the description of LMS system at a macro level and LMS products to support a particular discipline at a micro level. The authors propose the idea that particular pedagogical conditions must be created for successful deployment of the technologies. The participative approach is suggested as a basis of teacher-student collaboration.

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1. Introduction

New technologies play an important role in everyday life of most people in developed world. It is only natural that school system also has to react to this situation and has implemented information technologies into the educational process. On the government level, information technologies were incorporated into strategic planning and curricular documents not only as an independent subject but also as a tool for teaching. However, the most important thing about using information technologies in education is not the governmental policy but teachers

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themselves; their attitude towards technologies, their skills to work with them and to involve them into teaching and learning, their willingness to further education in this field.

The challenges that both teachers and learners are faced with are associated with the tools, technologies and systems of e-learning. E-learning is considered to be the third learning system that makes use of various electronic technologies, forms and components as its primary means of learning and teaching (Snyder, 1998; Rosenberg, 2001; Bowman, Holmes, and Swan, 1999). Both educators and learners have to choose from the variety of forms when being in a new educational environment. E-learning involves various technologies (TV, the internet, computers, software products for education etc), various components (e-books and dictionaries, e-libraries etc), various formats (e-learning courses and programmes, virtual learning centers, online programmes, virtual universities). More than 100 web-based technologies and software products are being used for educational purposes by the teachers and learners worldwide. Social media are topping the annual list of the most popular tools for learning (according to Center for Learning and Performance Technology-CALPT). Social media are considered to be an integral part of e-learning nowadays (Turgeon, 1997; Dalton, Liu, 2010). Many researchers point to the educational potential of social media tools (Chen, Bryer). First of all, social media expand the opportunities to participate, collaborate, find and share information, reflect and learn together which result in better learning. Secondly, an active involvement of social media provides better motivation and commitment, as it enriches the possibilities for creating lessons that students find more interesting and challenging. With new media it is possible to achieve greater diversity in teaching and exceed traditional classroom training. Besides, students get better media and IT skills when social media are used actively in class and that students get better prepared for the contemporary society where digital media are dominant.

We would like to focus the attention on the types of web-based technologies which are used by the authors for English language teaching (ELT) in the National Research University Higher School of Economics in general paying special attention to a specific LMS based products created as non-institutional learning platform for teacher-student collaboration. In our research we mainly describe the implementation of institutional and non-institutional web-based tools at formal and informal levels of T-S interaction.

2. Implementation of web-based technologies in the university at a macro level

2.1 Background

Web-based technologies are defined in different ways. In this paper we would use the definition advanced by Wankel(2010) who defines these tools as “any form of on-line technology or practices through which users create communities to convey information ideas, independent learning, entertainment, collaboration and personal messages and thus facilitates communication and interaction between individuals and groups”. Web-related technologies as social media are used in universities at a macro level (formal) and a micro level (interpersonal and informal) (Golder, Wilkinson and Huberman, Cummins). On a formal (macro) level social media, especially a social network, demonstrates how a large group of people are connected to one another (campuses, departments, faculties, groups etc). An informal level (micro) level consists of all the peers, friends, family and others – with whom one shares a social relationship (Golder, Wilkinson and Huberman).

Scientists note that social media at a micro level are used mainly for entertainment purposes and its educational potential is sometimes ignored by the educators despite its wide spread and popularity among students (Chen, Bryer).

Social media for teacher-student (T-S) collaboration can be classified into the following categories: blogs and microblogs (for example, Twitter), content communities (for example, YouTube and quizlet.com, podcasts etc.), social networking sites (for example, Facebook), collaborative projects (for example, Wikisites) (Kaplan, Haelein, 2010).

At a formal level most of these types are successfully integrated into the Learning Management System (LMS) based on a Moodle platform. Web-based platform, such as Moodle and Blackboard, have built-in wiki tools, which are designed to collaborate, share and build online content and are especially useful for learners who are separated by time and place. A Moodle platform is generally used to support blended learning and includes external

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