

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF USING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH TO STUDENTS OF ECONOMICS**

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### **Abstract**

The urgency of the problem under investigation is explained by the students' insufficient level of the formed skills in business English, the need for more intense study of this issue and creation of optimized methods of teaching business English, which could be used in training students of economics. The purpose of this article is to comprehensively justify creation of a theoretically proved, experimentally verified and relying on modern linguistic research on the method of teaching business English with the use of electronic resources. The leading method of the research is the experiment that was carried out with students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance of Kazan Federal University. The main result of the study was testing of the developed method of teaching business English, which promotes the development of creative initiative, increases motivation of future experts in the field of economics to learn foreign languages. The revealed dynamics of the process of knowledge acquisition demonstrates effectiveness of the introduction of electronic resources in teaching business English to students of economic faculties. Electronic resources may be used to form skills and any kind of speech activity at any stage of training, based on different forms of work (extracurricular and classroom, individual, pair, group, in the presence of a teacher, and without him or her); for all levels of education (from basic to advanced); in the framework of different approaches to learning. In modern conditions it is necessary to use new electronic technologies for the rapid exchange of relevant information in various areas of professional economic community. As practice shows, students-economists have developed logical thinking, which allows them to solve logical problems quite easily, to carry out tasks and exercises that involve various logical components; they are able to independently infer rules on the basis of the studied material and to identify exceptions. In addition, these students easily master the technique of work with electronic resources and multimedia programs. It can be explained by the fact that in the program of preparation of experts of an economic profile much attention is paid to the subjects of natural-mathematical cycle, as well as to computer training. Thus, the formed skills can be effectively engaged in learning business English, to which end the use of electronic resources seems logical. Obviously, teaching business English with the support of electronic resources will be more efficient and effective, as it is evidenced by the results of our study. The materials of the article may be useful for teaching business English in training programs for specialists in economics.

**Keywords:** e-learning, business English, economics, student, learning, teaching, education.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

E-learning is one of the modern global trends in education development. The basis of e-learning is the use of distance learning technologies — a set of methods, forms and means of mediated interaction of students with the teacher and each other in the learning process. Distance learning technologies are being actively implemented at Kazan Federal University (KFU), where they are used in traditional (day-time) and distance (correspondence) learning at different levels: in higher education programs, additional educational programs, professional development programs and professional retraining. The purpose of introduction of e-learning at KFU is to enhance efficiency of the learning process through the use of active learning methods and individualization of educational trajectories. LMS MOODLE (Learning Management System Modular Object-oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is the basis of e-learning at KFU.

### **1.1 Relevance of the Study**

Proficiency in business English is one of the criteria of professional competence of an expert in the field of economics nowadays. With the rapid development of information and communication technologies and their wide application in economics and business, the ability to use computer technologies in a professional context has become a real necessity. Therefore, the inclusion of elements of professional activities, implemented with the help of electronic technologies in the educational process of future economists, seems necessary for the development of their professional culture. It has now been proved that computer technologies can streamline the process of learning foreign languages itself (Chapelle, 2001; Evdokimova, 2007; Marsh, 2012). This fact once again confirms the feasibility of using electronic technologies to enhance the process of learning business English at the Faculty of Economics at a university (Rubin, 2008; Fakhrutdinova, 2015; Ilyasova, 2016; Mironov, 2010).

As it is known, MOODLE is an open source web application that provides the ability to create sites for e-learning (electronic courses). The authors of the article developed one of such courses containing the necessary training, support and control materials and guidelines (for both students and teachers) in accordance with the syllabus of the discipline, for the first- and second-year students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance at KFU.

The object of our research is the process of teaching the business English language to students of non-linguistic economic faculties.

The subject of the research is the method of teaching business English to students of economic faculties with the use of electronic resources.

The aim of this study is to provide a theoretically proved, experimentally verified and relying on modern linguistic research on the method of teaching business English to students of economics with the use of electronic resources.

### **1.2 Hypothesis of the Study**

The hypothesis is that the formation of skills and abilities in business English in students of economic faculties will be more effective if:

- in the forms of activities implemented at foreign language classes for students of economics the content of their professional and ethical activities will be modeled;
- when developing methods of teaching business English, standard typological features of written genres (business letters and e-mails, office memos, written reports and summaries) and oral genres (presentations, interviews, discussions and debates) of English will be taken into account;
- as a means of intensifying the process of learning variable educational and non-educational electronic resources will be used;
- the content of learning will include two main components — training and communication, on the one hand, and electronic and technological, on the other;
- the set of exercises will contain three main groups of exercises designed to: 1) teach business English proper; 2) teach business ethics in English; 3) form skills in independent work on mastering business English.

## **2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Research objectives**

The proposed hypothesis implied completion of the following tasks: 1) to investigate the particular conditions of business English teaching to students of economic faculties; 2) to study electronic resources that can be effectively used for teaching business English; 3) to identify the set of business skills in the English language to be built with the help of electronic resources; 4) to select and organize the learning content aimed at the formation of skills in business English; 5) to experimentally test the method of teaching business English with the use of electronic resources to students of economic faculties.

### **2.2 Research Methods and Methodological Basis**

In solving the above mentioned problems we used the following research methods: study and analysis of the theoretical and practical work in the fields of methodology, linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics; analysis of textbooks and manuals on the English language used for teaching business English to students of economic faculties; thematic logical analysis of economic and business English texts; study and generalization of experience of teaching business English at economic faculties; oral interviews with the students; teaching experiment; and mathematical processing of the experimental data.

The methodological basis was the research on the use of computer technologies in teaching foreign languages (Evdokimova, 2004; Satunina, 2006; Polat, 2007; Dmitrenko, 2009; Marsh, 2012; Aynutdinova, 2016, and many others).

### **2.3 Experimental Procedure and Its Description**

Development and testing of the above mentioned set of exercises were carried out during the pilot study, consisting of ascertaining, end-of-course and deferred assessments.

The pilot study took place from September 2016 to June 2017. The experiment involved first-year students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance of KFU.

In the course of the pilot study a survey of the testees and their pilot training were carried out in order to reveal and correct limitations of the developed complex of exercises. The survey had the following objectives: 1) to define the motivation to learn a foreign language; 2) to define the level of general computer literacy; 3) to determine the level of awareness of students about the use of the computer to learn English; 4) to define educational interests of students; 5) to identify genres of everyday speech, which cause the greatest difficulties for the students.

The main experiment was carried out with four groups of the first-year students (63 people), enrolled at the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance. The experiment took place on the basis of KFU. The method of teaching business English to students of economics with the use of electronic resources was implemented in the first and second semesters of the 2016/17 academic year (a total of 216 hours at the rate of 6 hours per week).

Four groups of students were selected for the experiment: two experimental groups (EG1 and EG2) and two control groups (CG1 and CG2), the English language proficiency of the students of the experimental and control groups was approximately the same and can be defined as Pre-Intermediate.

In the experimental groups, training was conducted with the use of the experimental materials prepared by us, in the control groups — with the use of the educational complex “Market Leader” (D. Cotton, D. Falvey, S. Kent, 2010) in accordance with the syllabus of the Department of English of University.

## **3 RESULTS**

### **3.1 Need for Optimized Methods Search**

Studying research materials on formation of skills in business English, familiarity with the practice of teaching business English at the Faculty of Economics and the authors' personal experience allowed to admit that the majority of students of economic faculties do not possess the skills in the business English communication: when presenting their thoughts orally or in writing, they are not aware of compositional features typical of oral and written English business genres, are hardly able to carry on a business conversation on the phone or create presentations on economic issues, etc.

Since the failure to use the English language for professional purposes results from the insufficient level of the formed foreign language skills in business English, it must be noted that more intensive study of this

issue and creation of optimized methods of teaching business English, which could be used in training students of economic specialties, are needed. We believe that it can be the method of teaching business English with the use of electronic resources.

### 3.2 Procedure and Results of the Experiment

The alleged method of teaching business English to students of economic faculties with the use of electronic resources passed experimental verification in the period from September 2016 to June 2017 with the first-year students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance of KFU.

Based on the results of the ascertaining assessment of students we made a fundamental conclusion: students-economists have poor skills in business English: they do not possess the business ethics skills in English, do not know the basic phrases and clichés used in oral and written business English genres, cannot accurately produce texts of the main genres of business communication.

The conducted in the course of the experiment end-of-course assessment of knowledge revealed a higher level of knowledge and skills in business English in both experimental and control groups. Moreover, the quantitative growth indicators in the experimental groups (EG1 and EG2) were approximately 18.6% higher than in the control groups (CG1 and CG2), which confirms the effectiveness of our proposed set of exercises in teaching business English to students of economic faculties.

Later, the deferred assessment confirmed the further positive dynamics of the process of acquiring knowledge, developing skills and knowledge in business English. Quantitative growth rates of the experimental groups (EG1 and EG2) were about 15.79% higher than these of the control groups (CG1 and CG2), as it is illustrated in Fig. 1:

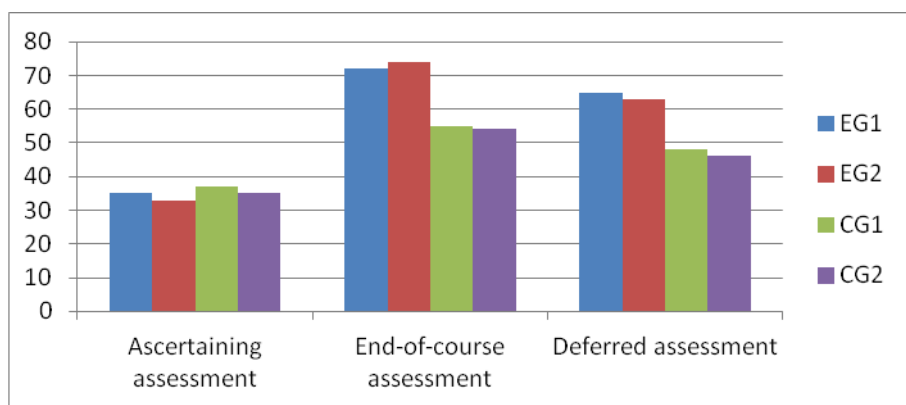


Fig. 1. Diagram of the average indicators of formation of skills in business English

Thus, the results of the experimental work show the effectiveness of the introduction of electronic resources in teaching business English to students of economic faculties.

### 3.3 Analysis of Learning a Foreign Language by Students of Economic Specialties

The analysis of learning a foreign language by students of economics detects the existing contradiction between the demands of the syllabus and the level of language skills of students.

It was found that the majority of students of the Economic faculty experience difficulties in producing oral and written English texts of business genres, which is caused by ignorance of the genres structure and etiquette of business communication, basic phrases and clichés used in written and oral business English genres. In addition, the factors hindering the process of learning business English include different levels of language proficiency of students in a group. A particular problem is the attitude of students to the study of a foreign language. Not all students are aware of the importance of foreign languages and are need to master a foreign language. Given that a foreign language is a secondary discipline at the faculty of Economics, students are often subject to the requirements imposed on them by the syllabus requirements: they are forced to master a foreign language, without feeling the need to do so and satisfaction from the learning process.

However, most students understand that the current situation in the labour market, when joint ventures with foreign partners are formed and branches of major foreign companies open, knowledge of business English is becoming one of the factors that give priority when applying for a job. Thus, we can confirm the need to develop a technique of teaching students of economic faculties business English, aimed at overcoming the

learning environment associated with different levels of language proficiency of students in a group and the formation of positive motivation of learning.

## **4 DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Importance of the problem**

Many researchers note that information technologies can provide individual and active nature of learning and increase students' interest in the subject and self-education, to develop cognitive independence and form learning motivation (Brown and Bimrose, 2006; Hanson, 2009; Yuqing, 2010; Mohr, 2012). Using computer technologies also helps to overcome with success the difficulties connected with different degrees of competence of students of non-linguistic high schools, because such technologies help teachers to pay due consideration to their individual level of proficiency.

In general, it should be stated that the importance and novelty of our study are explained by:

- the need to train qualified personnel in the economic sphere, where one of the criteria of professional competence is knowledge of a business foreign language;
- the need to find new and effective methods, approaches, technologies developing university economics students' skills in business foreign language communication, compensating learning environment connected with different levels of language proficiency of students in a group, students' low motivation to study a foreign language and a lack of natural use of a language as a means of communication;
- incomplete study of issues of business English teaching with the use of electronic resources.

Individualization of the process of mastering business English, based on the use of e-learning, can be achieved due to the possibility of varying the individual pace of work; providing an individual set of training supportive tools in the form of reference materials, tips, keys; adaptation of presentation forms of educational material to the individual characteristics of the user's perception; as well as possibility for a student to train any amount of time until a desired result (Satunina, 2006).

Integrative use of electronic resources requires the development of such an e-learning system that would be consistent with the goals, objectives and terms of training and could be updated promptly when they change. There is no doubt that the said system of e-learning tools should contribute to the understanding by students of economic faculties the relationship between a foreign language and the needs of their future professional activity; in addition, the system must teach students to use foreign language information environment as an additional source of educational and professional information.

### **4.2 Criteria for Creation of an E-Learning Course**

When creating an electronic resource for teaching business English, we tried to work according to the following criteria:

1. The criterion of compliance of e-learning materials with technical quality standards, which suggests the reliability of the program, the quality of graphics, audio and video materials;
2. The criterion of intuitive operating, which implies simplicity of the interface and navigation of the electronic resource. According to this criterion, to deal with electronic resources used in teaching business English, students do not need special skills in working with a computer, basic computer literacy is sufficient;
3. The criterion of possibility of analyzing and correcting errors, which means availability of special means as part of e-learning materials that allow the user to identify, analyze and correct errors in performing the task;
4. The criterion of taking into account the specificity of an electronic text, which means considering the perception of an electronic text as compared to a printed; the main differences include a smaller amount of text and the limited screen;
5. The criterion of variation of the amount of text on the screen, due to the performance and settings of the monitor, and the user's choice of the text representation and image scale;
6. The criterion of the complexity of electronic educational resources, which means parallel use in learning business English of such electronic materials as electronic dictionaries (monolingual and bilingual), reference books, encyclopedias, text editors, Internet resources, and others.
7. The criterion of variation of linguistic content of tasks, which requires a necessary and sufficient number of

exercises and activities, as well as the possibility of varying their language content, so that it can be used in learning business English only to a limited extent.

### **4.3 Selection of E-Learning Resources**

Examination of economy-related electronic resources as a means of training has allowed contrasting resources designed for teachers and those designed for students; electronic resources equally addressed to teachers and students can be allocated into a separate group. Resources for teachers include instrumental electronic resources, methodical Internet resources; those intended for students include training programs, educational online resources; resources of general purpose include dictionaries and encyclopedias, programs for word processing, software generators of business documents, authentic online resources on economic issues, programs providing communication through the Internet.

To form skills of independent work on mastering business English spoken language it is important to develop and use such types of exercises performed in an electronic environment like Jquiz, Jcloze, Jmatch, JigWord, Jmix, Jcross, SpeedWord, MatchWord, WordWeb, WordSearch; speech exercises (simulative, generative, information retrieval).

We have developed the set of exercises that allows students of economic faculties to shape not only speaking and academic skills, but also the ability to work with electronic resources on economics. The above mentioned skills can be formed not only under the teacher's guidance, but also independently. The sequence of exercises corresponds to the stages of speaking skills formation and ensures the increase in language difficulties and revision of previously introduced material with the aim of summing up and refreshing. The set of exercises was tested in the pilot study.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

Independent work is the most important form of education at Economics schools, a compulsory component of educational and research activity of students. Its effectiveness largely determines the quality of professional training at the Faculty of Economics.

Electronic resources may be used to form skills and any kind of speech activity at any stage of training, based on different forms of work (extracurricular and classroom, individual, pair, group, in the presence of a teacher, and without him or her); for all levels of education (from basic to advanced); in the framework of different approaches to learning.

In modern conditions it is necessary to use new electronic technologies for the rapid exchange of relevant information in various areas of professional economic community. As practice shows, students-economists have developed logical thinking, which allows them to solve logical problems quite easily, to carry out tasks and exercises that involve various logical components; they are able to independently infer rules on the basis of the studied material and to identify exceptions. In addition, these students easily master the technique of work with electronic resources and multimedia programs. It can be explained by the fact that in the program of preparation of experts of an economic profile much attention is paid to the subjects of natural-mathematical cycle, as well as to computer training. Thus, the formed skills can be effectively engaged in learning business English, to which end the use of electronic resources seems logical. Obviously, teaching business English with the support of electronic resources will be more efficient and effective, as it is evidenced by the results of our study.

## **6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The main purpose of such methods should be development of creative initiatives of future experts in the field of economics and increase in their motivation to learn foreign languages. It can be concluded that during the experiment the dynamics of the process of knowledge acquisition was revealed, which demonstrates the effectiveness of the process of learning business English using such techniques.

Effective teaching business English to students of economics with the use of electronic resources is possible, if at all stages of the educational process the specificity of goals, objectives and learning environment is taken into account.

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