Імплементація європейських стандартів в українські освітні дослідження - 2020

Implementation of European Standards into Ukrainian Educational Research - 2020

European Quality of Educational Research for Empowering Educators in Ukraine

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Українська асоціація дослідників освіти

Національна академія педагогічних наук України

Імплементація європейських стандартів в українські освітні дослідження

Збірник

матеріалів IV Міжнародної наукової конференції
Української асоціації дослідників освіти

26 червня 2020 року

УДК378.091(477):303.4
ББК 74.580(4УКР)

Схвалено та рекомендовано до друку правлінням Української асоціації дослідників освіти (протокол № 7 від 10 червня 2020 року)

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Імплементація європейських стандартів в українські освітні дослідження: Збірник матеріалів IV Міжнародної наукової конференції Української асоціації дослідників освіти (26 червня 2020 р.) / За ред. С. Щудло, О. Заболотної, Л. Загоруйко. – Дрогобич : ТзОВ «Трек-ЛТД», 2020. – 159 с.

Відповідальний за випуск: кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент Загоруйко Л.О.

ISBN 978-617-7263-90-5

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THE CONVERGENCE OF TECHNOLOGY, PEDAGOGY, AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Key words: *educational technology, innovative pedagogy, EFL learning, digital literacy.*

Introduction. With digital education on the rise educational technologies are transforming the way we live, work, and learn. They are gradually becoming a useful tool for English language teaching and learning. Modern students, who are considered to be '*digital natives'*, are inquisitive in nature. They become tech-savvy experts in operating various functions of contemporary gadgets that are more advanced and sophisticated with every coming year. In this light, it has been proven by an array of EFL practitioners to be a very useful and convenient tool for teaching and learning anywhere anytime (Kukulska-Hulme *et al,* 2015; Macianskiene 2016; Venkatesh *et al,* 2016).

To contribute to a rapidly growing body of theoretical research on educational technologies and language education, we developed a curriculum for a new interactive blended learning course *'Innovative Educational Technologies in English as a Foreign Language Learning/ Teaching'* for the undergraduate students within the Department of Germanic Philology, Faculty of Foreign Philology and Social Communications, Sumy State University, Ukraine. The course comprises a number of successful practices / approaches to digital literacy learning, current innovative instructional technologies for fostering intercultural communicative competency in EFL learning. The course is elaborated to provide pedagogical theories (primarily, cognitivism, constructivism and connectivism) and practical strategies for implementing technology in the university language learning and humanities curriculum to enhance student success. Thus far, the proposed course is innovative because it develops and optimizes well-known teaching / learning techniques; enables the implementation of better pedagogical solutions, learning strategies and educational technologies.

The main research question to guide this investigation is whether a new interactive blended learning course made a positive impact on students' language acquisition, improved their digital literacy, and helped them gain new soft and hard skills.

The working **hypothesis** of the research is the following: A digitally-enhanced instruction made a positive impact of on students' academic success, consequently they developed their hard skills (both linguistic and teaching), as well as an array of soft skills (digital literacy, problem-solving, collaboration, team-work, public speaking, etc.).

The research goals and methodologies are aimed at describing pros and cons of the best educational technologies, predict their efficacy in fostering students' hard and soft skills, determine and explain cause and effect relationships between student academic accomplishments, and use of innovative technologies.

The steps to be taken are the following: to explore current strategies for effective use of new literacies; to establish a blueprint for effective integration of

technology into EFL teaching / learning; to develop effective tools for monitoring and assessing the competences of students; to address meaningful, productive, creative and content specific uses of technology in the classroom; to infuse current best practices and research to existing teacher preparation programs; to create a plan of action for teachers to develop high quality online courses at higher education institutions in Ukraine; to take advantage of virtual learning, promote and support the integration of technology into teaching and learning at Ukrainian universities.

The following part of this paper moves on to describe in greater detail the research methods and approaches to the intervention: sampling, research design, data collection, and analysis. The research was conducted in 2019/2020 academic year within the abovementioned course. The study participants are the 4th-year BA students (N=39) enrolled in Translation Studies. The research design aligns with the course Syllabus. To obtain informed testimonials and answer the research question, the empirical study uses a self-report questionnaire, which was originally devised for this study. The questionnaire was designed to collect both qualitative (with open-ended questions) and quantitative data (with closed-ended questions), "enjoying the rewards of both numbers and words" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992 p. 8, cited in Golafshani, 2003). Embodied in this citation is the idea of combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches that strengthen a study. As a result of it, the research reliability and validity can be maximized.

Feedback from the questionnaire expanded our understanding of the students' attitudes towards the following Sections: (1) teaching approaches, (2) feedback and assessment, (3) resources and administration, (4) students' overall experience, (5) comments on strengths and ways of improvement of the *'Innovative Educational Technologies in English as a Foreign Language Learning/Teaching'*.

Research findings and results. The outputs of the Section (1) questions indicate that the students *Strongly Agree* on the following: the instructor stimulated their interest in the subject 28/39 (71.8%), managed classroom time and pace well 33/39 (84.6%), encouraged discussions, responded to questions, and demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the subject 34/39 (87.2%), used a variety of instructional methods to reach the course objectives (e.g. group discussions, student presentations, etc.) 35/39 (89.7%). As indicated in the Figure 1 below, it is clear that more emphasis should be placed on the enhancement of the learning engagement in virtual environment.

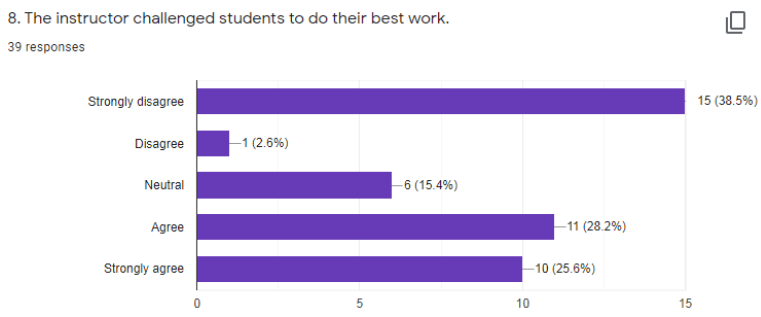

Figure 1

Turning now to Section (2), responses to which indicate that 3/4th of students consider that instructor's feedback showed how to improve their work (e.g. corrections including comments), while 1/4th of them *Disagree.* Some students' comments to the open-ended question can be seen below:

'During the lockdown, the instructor gave us feedback almost timely, but I felt lack of face-to-face communication and attention like I would have during an on-campus course. I think I needed much deeper evaluation, but at the same time I understand the volume of work the instructor needs to do'.

'The opportunity to contact the teacher via email, various messengers, Trello board and Graasp platform was very useful. If something was not clear, everyone could clarify the details. The constructive comments that the teacher gave after each submitted assignment helped me improve various skills'.

'I really like that during class discussions you value our viewpoints and make comments very delicately. You create a very pleasant atmosphere where all students want to share their opinion. The assessment is clear and fair'.

Moving on now to consider Section (3) questions. The students' responses demonstrate the need for more adequate information resources and the instructor's guidance on where to find them, as well as higher quality of software and mobile / web applications used during the course (Figure 2). It might be effective to use different digital tools and content for a simpler and more connected learning experience next semester. Although, there were a lot of positive comments to the open-ended questions, e.g.:

'I have learnt how to work on many new educational platforms and it's great!'

'All resources were up-to-date, useful and relevant to the topics of the course. They were available on the Trello board during the whole semester'

'I discovered many new applications to learn and teach an array of skills. Now I know how to use them in real life. It will contribute to my portfolio and help me get a job'.

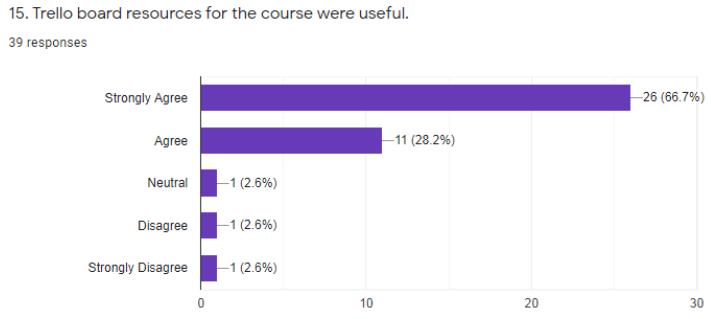

Figure 2.

To have a clearer and more concise presentation of students' overall experience (Section 4) it is worthwhile to study Figure 3 below. What stands out in this graph is the low rate of students who has fair and poor perceptions upon completing the course.

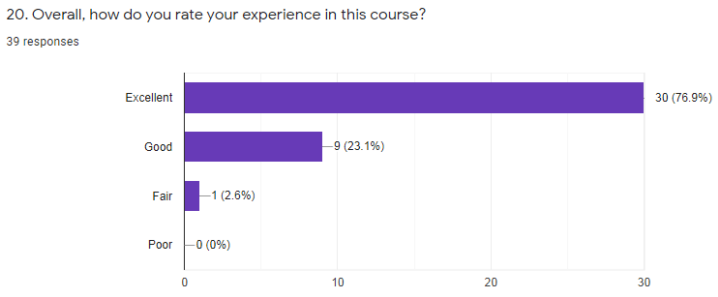

Figure 3

An analysis of the data presented in the Figure 4 below indicates that the course was time-consuming and the students had to put a lot of time and effort into this pilot project to achieve the learning outcomes.

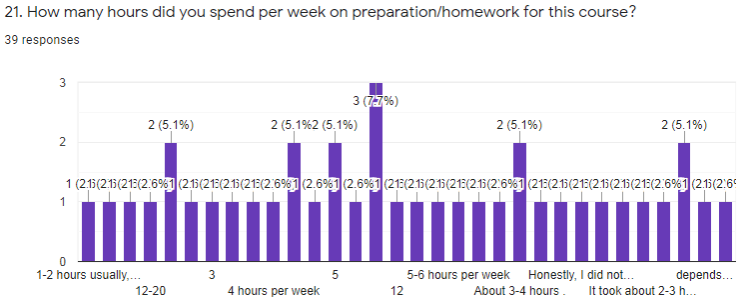

Figure 4

What can be clearly seen from the Section (5) responses is that unlike a campus course, an online learning happens continually in the asynchronous environment. It's a struggle for both students and teachers. So, in order to maintain the classroom dynamic and keep things personable in a digital environment it is important to be able to coordinate virtual group activities using chats or cloud tools for collaboration. According to the survey, students gained new soft and hard skills by means of an array of technological tools. Therefore, the results of the study endorse the working hypothesis of the research.

Conclusions. In order to elaborate a worthwhile course, it is crucial to combine deep research knowledge with classroom experiences so as to challenge students to be innovative in their learning, and professional practices across diverse educational settings. So, we are purposefully tailoring an academic course that can effectively combine on-campus classes, synchronous hybrid classes, and online asynchronous classes. From our perspective, all university instructors have to rethink their course design and use different strategies for teaching, engagement and assessment in the online environment, particularly now, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world.

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