

Features of *iSpring* suite learning platform for teaching foreign languages

Características de la plataforma de aprendizaje de la suite *iSpring* para la enseñanza de idiomas extranjeros

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ABSTRACT:

The article presents technologies for creating interactive multimedia training materials using the example of iSpring programs for developing hybrid training courses used for contact and distance learning. It proves that a training platform contributes to the intensification of the educational process when teaching foreign languages in higher school and activates the external motivation of students. The significance of web technologies for the language educational space is noted

Keywords: Modern format of humanitarian knowledge, information technology, training platform, interactive training materials, hybrid training courses.

RESUMEN:

El artículo presenta tecnologías para crear materiales interactivos de capacitación multimedia usando el ejemplo de los programas iSpring para desarrollar cursos de capacitación híbridos utilizados para el aprendizaje a distancia y de contacto. Esto demuestra que una plataforma de capacitación contribuye a la intensificación del proceso educativo cuando se enseñan idiomas extranjeros en la escuela superior y activa la motivación externa de los estudiantes. Se destaca la importancia de las tecnologías web para el espacio educativo de la lengua

Palabras clave: formato moderno de conocimiento humanitario, tecnología de la información, plataforma de capacitación, materiales de capacitación interactivos, cursos de capacitación híbridos.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the research can be described as an attempt to represent the technology of creating interactive teaching materials when teaching foreign languages to students of humanities in the pedagogical university in terms of developing linguistic education practices. The modern era sets priorities in the development of foreign languages as a tool for acculturation. Informatization in the era of globalization is characterized by the process of intensive development and introduction of new technologies in all spheres of life, including

education. M.N. Epstein, a famous philologist and philosopher, professor of cultural theory (Emory University, USA), notes that the modern format of the functioning of humanitarian knowledge which can change the world presupposes its readiness to be competitive, i.e. capable of creating such an intellectual product which due to the emergence of new humanitarian technologies will be in demand in the domestic and foreign markets. The need to find ways to turn the humanities into humanitarian practices is emphasized so that the humanities become socially and professionally in demand (Epstein, 2016).

The application of humanitarian technologies comes to the forefront, among which, according to N.I. Almazov, are:

- studying models of optimal and effective knowledge transfer in language form;
- technologies for extracting information and knowledge from large amounts of raw data (Data Mining), because at the heart of almost all activities in the modern technological space is the ability to analyse, extract and process information from various sources;
- technologies of social knowledge engineering (Knowledge Engineering), where the humanitarian perspective is the basis of methods and instruments of the influence of individuals, institutions, corporations on each other (Almazova, 2015).

The main task of this work is to consider the peculiarities of developing hybrid training courses used for contact and distance learning of foreign languages. Market conditions and requirements of employers dictate a new level of training of competent specialists to the educational environment who know a foreign language in their field of professional activity. Important is not only the readiness of the foreign language teacher to organize the linguistic educational process in the university considering the technological stages of training of specialists but also the ability to develop a foreign language course for the training of specialists on the order of the employer (Cherkashin, 2017; Tareva, 2015). In this context, scientists raise the fair question of how to relate to the diversification of new technologies, especially when teaching a foreign language for professional purposes (Cherkashina, 2016). The search for such technologies is very intensive and, as a result, the modern educational material is primarily an interactive multimedia presentation of knowledge.

To solve the problem, it is necessary to identify how modern educational technologies contribute to increasing the effectiveness and objectivity of quality control of the learning of the material by students using a specific training platform.

2. Materials and Methods

The material and tasks of the work determined the choice of methods and techniques for investigating the advantages of the training platform. In particular, the use of project technology aimed at building the information and communication competence of the student has come to the fore. The question of the use of IT in training with the support of specialized educational electronic resources corresponding to modern didactic and methodological requirements arises with particular urgency. Linguists note that despite a large number of platforms that allow for varied training, there is currently an insufficient number of mobile programs for teaching foreign languages that have high-quality content, technical base and the possibility of their practical implementation in the education system (Molchanova and Staritsyna, 2017). Foreign specialists on linguodidactics (language education) write that an important factor in the active implementation of modern web tools in teaching foreign languages is free access to them and their wide range: microblogging, podcasts, and wiki sites as a tool for creating a virtual classroom, audio resources and podcasts (Voice Thread, Audacity, Audiopal, Chirbit, Gabcast), etc. (Solomon and Schrum, 2014).

Tight deadlines and a limited number of hours for practical foreign language lessons at universities require a concentrated form of work on linguistic material. Distance (mobile) learning, having a high degree of variability, is able to intensify the educational process in the system of higher education, to improve its effectiveness by creating additional external motivation for students. This circumstance prompts the most active part of specialists teaching a foreign language to turn to a combined model of training, which implies a combination of traditional methods of work with independent work and training of students. The level of modern IT-development allows us to use this model in the practice of teaching a

language with maximum efficiency (Begeneva, 2010).

In fact, new web technologies perform a compensatory function (in the terminology of E.V. Luchina), which assumes the formation of the ability to adapt to constantly changing conditions when the future specialist faces new tasks that require immediate resolution. At the same time, compensatory competence will allow expanding the cognitive experience of the student and mastering new means of communication (Luchina, 2014). The approach used to IT-technologies, on the one hand, ensures the creation of common qualifications of European specialists, which increases the mobility of students in the labour market. On the other hand, the use of interactive training materials contributes to the formation of a highly qualified specialist that meets the requirements of a modern market economy. In this vein, the following aspects are important (Luchina, 2014):

1. Aspects of individualized learning.
2. Aspect of professionalism. The formation of a specialist of a new generation occurs at the maximum approximation to practice, i.e. to real professional activity.
3. Aspect of adaptability. Modern conditions require a new specialist, active and flexible in decision-making when it is not so much knowledge that is important but the ability to adapt and apply it in a rapidly changing environment.

This raises the problem of minimizing the time and money spent on developing interactive multimedia training materials. The bottom line is that the teacher ready to offer the technology of interactive multimedia presentation of educational materials is often forced to do double work. On the one hand, he must prepare materials for their demonstration on appropriate (adequate) multimedia equipment in the classroom, and on the other hand, he needs to develop such materials that can be reproduced within the available software.

iSpring, a program intended for the publication of training courses (including when teaching foreign languages) within the framework of the system of combined training is one of such training platforms. The use of adequate information technologies and software supporting them puts the teacher in front of a choice. After considering several options, in the final analysis, we focused on the technology for converting the Microsoft PowerPoint presentation into FLASH (or HTML5) format for demonstration on the online course pages. Using this technology, a software product was selected, or rather a family of software products of the Russian company iSpring, who know how to do it. One of the main advantages of iSpring products is that they do not need the professional skills of a programmer to work with them - the program's arsenal has everything you need for the independent development of training materials. Another advantage of iSpring is the one-time development of a remote training course for the Moodle system which is actively used in almost all universities. There is no need to separately prepare material for lessons; if you have an iSpring program, the created course can be 'packed' into SCORM for the Moodle system or used as a methodical material directly for the work in the lesson.

Materials of the training distance courses (workshops) developed in iSpring are available for viewing on computers, laptops, tablets, iPad, iPhone, Android and Windows devices. On the example of e-courses being developed, the iSpring Suite program demonstrates a set of special functions that expand the PowerPoint capabilities:

- recording of a screen to create training video lessons and upload them to YouTube;
- audio/video editor for fast processing of recordings: noise removal, clip cutting, volume control;
- creation of interactivity (book, catalogue, timeline, question-answer);
- creating courses with branching and 'smart' navigation;
- design and configuration of the player for viewing courses, tests, interactivity;
- inserting videos from YouTube, Flash movies, and Web objects;
- adding Web links and files (PDF, DOC, XLS, and others);
- development of tests and surveys (the possibility of creating 23 types of questions);
- unique design of the test (survey);
- converting to mp4 video format and uploading to YouTube.

3. Results

Within the chosen technology, the creation of educational material begins with the development of a traditional presentation in Microsoft PowerPoint. We consider it necessary to systematize the existing knowledge and supplement them with what is usually left behind in the study of Microsoft PowerPoint.

A course created in iSpring Suite is translated into a format that can be played on traditional multimedia equipment in classrooms and in a format that allows you to publish it in the Learning Management System. This eliminates the double work of developing training materials. Among the basic requirements for constructing the structure of the named courses, we note:

- logical separation of the structural unit,
- the availability for the student (undergraduate, master's student) of the possibility to directly navigate from any structural unit to any other, logically associated with it,
- the ability to move from one section of the course to another.

When creating distance training workshops in iSpring, much attention is paid to the correct design of the general architecture of courses, namely the construction of courses in the form of a hierarchy of relatively small, logically closed parts (sections) with a simple and informative navigation system. At the same time, we offer a system of design solutions that allow each teaching material to get an appearance adequate to its tasks, make its division into small training elements more understandable, show the degree of its importance for mastering the topic, and other characteristics. Such solutions are offered in the form of ready-made styles.

The use of a variety of graphics, animation, and simulation helps to increase the attractiveness of the developed distance courses. When creating training workshops for students studying a foreign language, the principle of unity is used: during each of the courses presented, a uniform colour palette is maintained, the same font design, uniform style of design, etc. are used.

The texts accompanying the graphics and animation are convenient for a quick familiarization. They are complete, guiding information that allows the reader to fully master it. An important factor, in this case, is the legibility of the accompanying texts that guide and inform those who are learning a foreign language. In our case, directing informing texts is an act of transferring information that sends the reader to new information of another level (Vasilye, 2010).

The learning distance workshops were created by and master's students of the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Moscow City Pedagogical University (MSPU) in a 2016-2017 academic year when studying the possibilities of the iSpring program in the classroom within the courses "Information Technology in Teacher's Work", "Computer Technologies in Education". In particular, on the example of French as the first foreign language, workshops "French chanson", "French cartoons", "Regional languages of France", etc. have been created. An interesting factual material is an important feature of building courses. In the preparation of the workshops, it was important that during practical learning the material be 'captured' by the students.

In the framework of the above disciplines, 120-130 undergraduates/master's students study on this program every semester, and work with the learning platform makes it possible to understand the practical importance of developing electronic courses. The peculiarity of the learners is that they are linguists, it is harder for them to master new technologies. Linguists, unlike engineering students, are linguistic personalities with a different way of perceiving the world, the opposite thinking type. Consequently, when developing interactive technologies, it is necessary to take into account that the students of the humanities have a visual-spatial type of thinking ("right hemisphere type"), and students of engineering - verbally-logical ("left hemisphere type") (Linguistic personality..., 2006).

When determining the effectiveness of distance courses developed at the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Moscow City Pedagogical University, the following criteria are used: subjective satisfaction of students with the training course; practical skills acquired by students in the process of creating the course; as well as the time necessary for the

students to study the materials of the learning workshop. The technology of developing interactive multimedia materials, which is discussed in the article, has been taught in our university for the sixth year already. Our graduates actively apply it in their educational activities (Gerasimova, and Makarova, 2016). On the iSpring site, in the blog about distance learning, a sample of one of these student's works is presented (Makarova).

When creating and building distance courses that represent information aimed at acquaintance with the country-specific material, a certain structure was observed:

- the authors of the course are named (in this case, it is possible to give a brief biography of the author(s), their main publications);
- availability of an introduction with a general characteristic of the course, a reflection of its purpose and objectives, as well as the place and relationship with other disciplines of the program in the specialty;
- the main text is in the form of modules with illustrations and definitions, links to other pages of the course and other sources of information on the Internet, as well as the main conclusions on the section. Each module has its own title;
- the final test represents a variety of types of questions on the distance course subjects covered.

The created courses can easily be uploaded on the Internet, downloaded to the iSpring Cloud service, and published in learning management systems such as Moodle, BlackBoard, iSpring Online and other systems that support SCORM, AICC and Experience API standards.

4. Conclusion

Realization of the possibilities of modern web technologies expands the range of types of learning activity and creates conditions for mastering new organizational forms and methods of teaching. Studying the possibilities of using the interactive language course with the application of the mixed model of training showed that iSpringSuite program expands the creative abilities of the teacher and allows preparing a successful, independent, self-governing student.

Thanks to the application of the iSpring program, the possibilities of online tasks of the open type (creative tasks) are most fully realized. At the same time, the mixed model of training is equally successful in both traditional and intensive classes for learning foreign languages.

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