

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

RFL Online Course in Moodle LMS: Development and Application

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Abstract

The relevance of creating electronic textbooks on RFL is due to the search for new forms of education and interaction between teachers and students in a distance learning format. The article discusses a model of an electronic course on RFL, which is implemented at the stage of pre-university training at the South-West State University. The textbook is integrated in "Electronic information and educational environment of SWSU. SWSU's Courses" on Moodle platform, which allows, thanks to its functionality, to present educational material in various forms, vary the methods of managing students' independent educational activities, and organize the necessary audiovisual support in language learning. The basis for the creation of this electronic resource is a communicative-activity approach aimed at the formation and development of all types of speech activity. The authors state the results of a survey of foreign students on the implementation of the model of learning via the electronic resource. The survey made it possible to adjust the materials of the electronic resource, as well as the forms and methods of work in remote mode, taking into account the needs of foreign students. The proposed model of the electronic course is aimed at the realization of teaching foreign students in accordance with the requirements necessary for mastering the Russian language within the framework of Elementary, Basic and First certification levels (A1, A2, B1).

Keywords: distance learning; principles of teaching; educational resources.

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Introduction

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The study of Russian as a foreign language in a distance format at the stage of pre-university training has required a change in the forms and methods of work, the system for presenting educational materials, adjusting control methods based on information and communication technologies (ICT).

In the context of distance learning, one of the tools that make it possible to provide teaching in RFL, control the knowledge of foreigners is an online course, which is based on a set of educational and methodological materials posted on the Internet and ensuring the foreign students' study of the disciplines stated in the curriculum in the required volume with using distance learning technologies.

One of the important educational principles is the principle of consistency in learning, therefore the online course for preparing foreign citizens for admission to Russian universities relies on a specially created electronic textbook.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the experience of developing and mastering an RFL electronic course integrated in the base "Electronic information and educational environment of South-West State University. SWSU's courses" and implemented at the stage of pre-university training of foreign citizens. The practical realization of the course model is carried out in Moodle LMS, which provides ample opportunities for e-learning. The article presents and analyzes the structural features of the course, organized in such a way as to provide foreign students with effective and comfortable learning of the Russian language. An important part of the study is to obtain feedback from the students on working with the RFL electronic course and consider this data to determine the prospects for the development and improvement of educational and methodological materials.

Literature review

Constant changes in our life, challenges faced by the whole world, put the digitalization of education in the first place in terms of the importance of methodological issues. In this regard, many scientists devote their work to the specifics of the development and use of various electronic didactic tools.

E.G. Azimov notes that now in the scientific and pedagogical literature there are various terms denoting electronic means of teaching a language: *interactive online course*, *electronic textbook*, *multimedia textbook*, *hypertext textbook*, *digital textbook*, etc. (Azimov, 2020). Moreover, all the terms and the corresponding definitions sometimes refer to different types of electronic learning tools, such as, for example:

- an electronic version of the printed edition: hypertext links, multimedia visualization tools, training and test tasks with a formal analysis of the correct / incorrect answer have been added to the printed text;
- an Internet site: the site is an addition to the printed materials of the textbook; the site contains multimedia materials, training exercises and tasks, additional materials that may constantly change depending on the conditions and goals of teaching;
- an online resource that simulates the language environment, represents typical situations of communication with the participation of native speakers, sets the task of organizing communication in oral or written form using electronic means of communication; actively uses multimedia tools for the presentation of educational material, the creation of visual supports for speech production (Azimov, 2020).

This difference in interpretation is explained by the presence of various forms of support for the educational process and the lack of generally accepted basic requirements for electronic textbooks in foreign languages.

Based on these definitions, the following elements can be distinguished as mandatory in the structure of an electronic textbook: printed text, a multimedia component (animation, video and audio files), practice work (exercises, control questions and tests). Additional components for the website, online resource are a monitoring module that demonstrates statistics of completed tasks and exercises, training time; electronic dictionaries, built-in reference books; a remote support service-unit; illustrative material (tables, figures, photos).

The results of distance learning largely depend on the quality of electronic teaching materials, which should be created taking into account the following didactic principles: personality-oriented, activity-oriented, functional, scientific principles, principles of consistency, accessibility, developmental learning, continuity, as well as taking into account the communicative-cognitive and sociocultural approaches to language learning.

Undoubtedly, the peculiarity of electronic textbooks is their multimodality and multichannel nature (Kibrik, 2018). Multimodality is understood as different ways of human communication and interaction, “polysemiotic transmission of communicative intentions and information using verbal and non-verbal channels (modes) - language (writing and sounds), as well as other semiotic systems (e.g. color, touch, gesture, gait, body movement). The use of the so-understood multimodality and polycode objects at the lessons of Russian as a foreign language contributes to an increase in motivation and interest, arouses a desire to speak out, that is, helps to form communicative competence” (Kozdra 2018).

E-learning as an educational service involves taking into account the personal needs and goals of a foreign student, in particular, of building an individual educational trajectory. According to the researchers, “teaching foreign languages online does not just provide an opportunity to delegate control over the process of completing assignments to students, it is based on their substantial autonomy. Cyberspace offers a variety of tools to meet the needs of learners based on their individual characteristics” (Solovieva, 2016).

At the same time, it should be noted that when modeling an electronic educational RFL resource capable of providing the development of communicative skills of foreigners, a prerequisite is the functional rigidity of the course structure, strict prescription of educational steps (Gonchar & Popova, 2018).

Undoubtedly, a significant factor determining the success of any textbook, including an electronic one, was and still is the contents of the didactic material, which should reflect social phenomena, events, processes occurring at the international level, and, of course, the Russian language textbook for foreigners should serve as a means of forming a positive image of the country of the target language (Devdariani & Rubtsova, 2020; Petrova 2020).

To post didactic materials on the Internet, teachers can choose from various options: create a personal website (for example, on the Google platform - Google Sites), a web application, a mobile application or a computer program. However, to work with an electronic textbook underlying the online course, it seems appropriate to use a specialized platform, in particular, Moodle LMS. Thanks to its functional capabilities, it helps the teacher to present educational material in various forms, to vary the methods of managing students' independent learning activities, to organize the necessary audiovisual support in language learning.

Methodology

To achieve this goal, the following methods were used: analysis and generalization of research results, review of the experience of creating electronic textbooks in the Russian language, survey of foreign students. The research is based on the approaches used in the theory and practice of teaching languages: communicative, sociocultural, problematic, competence approaches. The material for the study was the electronic RFL course in Moodle LMS, implemented at the stage of pre-university training for foreign citizens at the South-West State University.

Results

An electronic course created by a team of authors of Department of Russian Language and General Education disciplines for foreign citizens of South-West State University on Moodle platform is a structured hypertext interactive educational material (interactive educational text), presented in blocks (with the account of types of speech activities and lexis and grammar work) in accordance with the level of language proficiency. The electronic textbook includes educational materials, a methodological section, additional materials, as well as materials and tools for conducting practice, intermediate and final control testing.

The independent work of foreign students in the conditions of distance learning comprises a significant part of education, therefore, the electronic textbook includes such methodological materials that help to navigate foreigners and form an algorithm for their actions in the process of independent work:

- a guide for studying the course, which presents the structure of the course, the sequence and timing of studying the topics of the course, performing test tasks; requirements for completing assignments;
- calendar educational-thematic plan, including a complete list of the topics for study, tasks and control activities, the sequence and timing of their study and completion.

The regulated algorithm of educational activity contributes to the formation of skills of independent work and therefore is extremely important for foreigners who begin to learn Russian a) remotely, b) in an educational environment new to them.

The contents of the electronic resource under consideration is determined by the requirements for the RFL proficiency levels.

The electronic training course for the pre-university stage of studying Russian as a foreign language, integrated in “Electronic information and educational environment of SWSU. SWSU’s courses” on Moodle platform, includes modules: RFL (Introductory-phonetic course, Elementary, Basic, First certification levels), “Language of educational and scientific sphere of communication” (with the account of training orientation). In each module, students are offered a system of tasks within the framework of consistently presented topics. The choice of Moodle LMS for posting didactic materials also makes it possible to provide a control system with feedback, when the teacher has the opportunity to comment on the results and answer questions in the chat.

The RFL module is divided into 3 blocks by types of activity: lexis and grammar; reading and writing, listening and speaking (see Fig. 1). Such a structure allows the maximum concentration of foreign students’

attention on a specific type of speech activity or the language material to be studied. Each block is an organizational and functional unit, within which the solution of the problem leads to the acquisition of communicative skills. The blocks are combined on the basis of a common topic, which allows to implement lexical and grammatical skills in speaking.

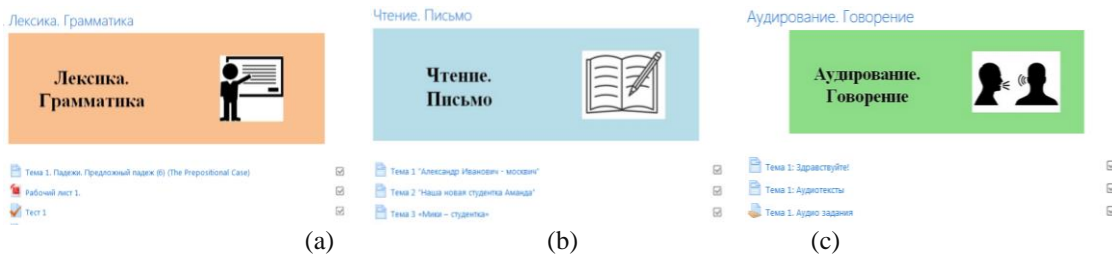


Figure 1. (a) & (b) & (c) Blocks in the course’s RFL module on Moodle platform

In order to determine the effectiveness of the developed model of teaching Russian as a foreign language in a distance form realized via the base “Electronic information and educational environment of South-West State University. SWSU’s courses” on Moodle platform, a survey of foreign students of Preparatory faculty for foreign citizens of the SWSU’s Institute of International Education (IIO) was conducted.

Distance learning includes various forms of work. The survey showed that online work in a group with teacher’s guidance is most convenient for students (83.3%), individual online work with a teacher is also considered important (58.3%), but independent work with educational materials as the preferred form of work was not reported by any student (0%) (see Fig. 2). Thus the foreign students prefer to study the language via videoconference in a group and under the guidance of a teacher. This kind of work is actually the most effective for language learning. At the same time, as the survey showed, the skills of independent work among foreign students are not sufficiently developed and so are in need to be formed.

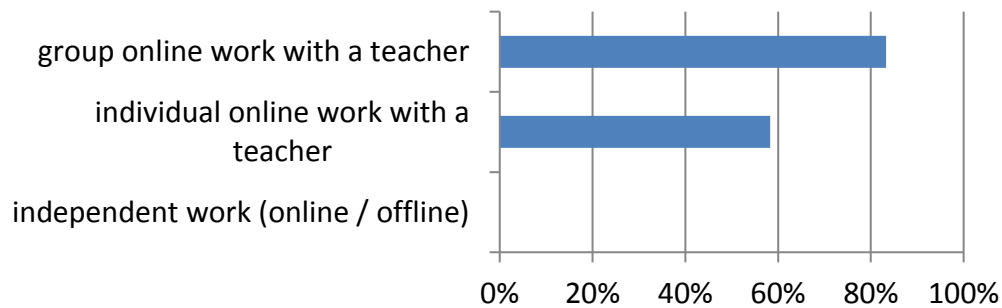


Figure 2. Answers to the question “What form of work do you prefer?”

The survey showed that foreigners like to develop their skills in all the aspects of Russian language proficiency, but they give preference to speaking (75%), listening (75%) and reading (66.7%), and of the greatest difficulty for them is studying vocabulary and grammar (91.7%) (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).

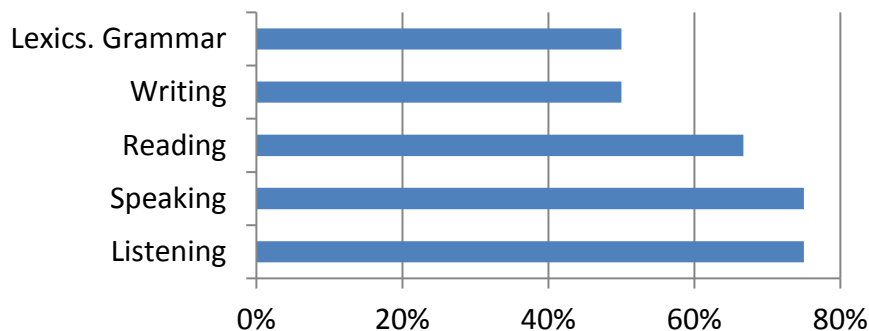


Figure 3. Answers to the question “What aspect of learning Russian do you like?”

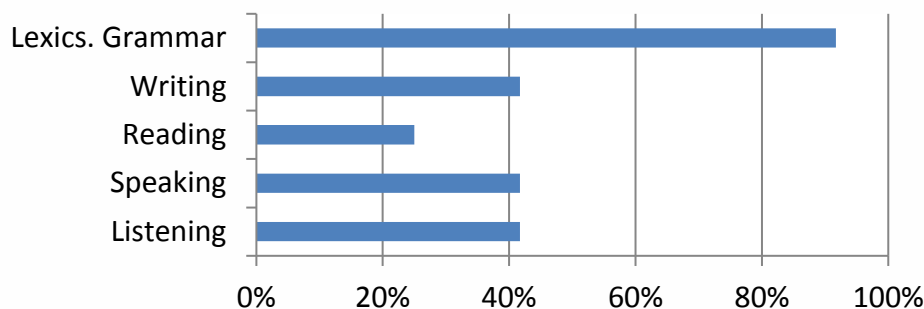


Figure 4. Answers to the question “What aspect is the most difficult for you when learning Russian in a distance format (online)?”

The process of teaching Russian as a foreign language should be varied; therefore, students are offered various types of assignments (see Table 1). The most favorite tasks for students are the following: “work with video” (91.7%), “answer questions” (75%), “work with audio texts” (75%). Students give the least preference to the tasks “write a letter” (16.7%), “describe a picture / photo” (25%). As we can see, these are productive tasks, for the fulfillment of which foreigners need to use all the accumulated knowledge, activate their creative abilities, and this presents difficulties for many of them, since at the initial stage of training, many students strongly feel the limitedness of the assimilated language resources to be able to express themselves freely.

Table 1. Answers to the question “What tasks do you like to do?”

№	Answers	Quantitative indicator of the chosen answers, %
1.	work with video	91,7
2.	answer questions	75
3.	work with audio texts	75
4.	do a test	58,3
5.	do a grammar task	58,3
6.	read a text out loud	58,3
7.	translate and learn new words	58,3
8.	write a dictation	50
9.	ask questions	50
10.	study grammar tables	41,7
11.	compose a dialogue	33,3
12.	compose a story	33,3
13.	retell a text	33,3
14.	do a phonetic exercise	33,3
15.	describe a picture / photo	25
16.	write a letter (to a friend, ...)	16,7

In order to determine the factors hindering the effective study of the Russian language, the question “What problems do you face when you work with the assignments?” was included in the survey (see Table 2). The most frequent answers: “difficulties with the internet connection” (91.7%), “technical problems with a computer / phone / other gadgets (video, sound, ...)” (58.3%), as well as “the difficulty of tasks” (58, 3%).

Table 2. Answers to the question “What problems do you face when you work with the assignments?”

№	Answers	Quantitative indicator of the chosen answers, %
1.	difficulties with the internet connection	91,7
2.	technical problems with a computer / phone / other gadgets (video, sound, ...)	58,3

3.	the difficulty of tasks	58,3
4.	it takes a long time to remember information	50
5.	the amount and the scope of tasks	33,3
6.	the pace at which I work	33,3
7.	I get tired quickly	25
8.	other external factors	16,7
9.	other internal (psychological, physiological) factors	8,3

As the survey has shown, distance learning of Russian as a foreign language is associated with a number of problems for both foreigners and teachers. So, in the process of synchronous communication, in the videoconference mode, difficulties arise in teaching phonetics, problems of collective interaction (for example, working in pairs, in small groups), which is associated with technical problems, low internet connection speed for foreign students, students' work in the premises not specially adapted for educational activities; different time zones; lack of immersion in the language environment.

Thus, the survey of students of the preparatory faculty for foreign citizens of SWSU's IIO allows to realize representative study monitoring, carry out operational adjustments of the electronic textbook model to achieve greater efficiency of the educational process.

Discussions

Of fundamental importance while designing an electronic textbook is the selection and organization of the material based on situations and communication problems that meet the needs and interests of the students.

The creation of the electronic textbook on RFL is based on a communicative-activity approach aimed at harmonious development and mutual influence in the educational process of all types of speech activity, which is most conducive to achieving the main goal of learning – the development of communicative competence, i.e. the ability to solve communication problems in the process of oral and written verbal communication (Zimnyaya, 2001; Shaklein, 2011; Sheilz, 1995).

The structure of the course includes all types of speech activity based on lexis and grammar, which “contributes to the formation and development of speech skills, that is, it performs an operational and instrumental function in speech-thinking activity” (Samchik, 2019).

The grammar material meets the requirements for levels A1, A2, B1. The grammar of each language has its own peculiarities. (Vlasenko, Zanina & Tolmacheva, 2020). The Russian language is characterized by a ramified case system, has a special tense system for perfective and imperfective verbs, and all that is necessary to be learnt at the initial stage of studying the language (Baranova, Panova & Kharitonova, 2019). No doubt, the development of such skills may face certain difficulties for foreigners, in this regard, the grammatical topics in the electronic textbook are presented in stages in accordance with traditional linguodidactics.

Learning grammar requires considerable effort from the foreigners, and charts and tables as traditional visual material help to systematize grammatical material. Grammar tables are integrated into the structure of each lesson, and are also attached as separate files in PDF format.

Grammar competence is the foundation for the formation of communicative competence. Written exercises of the electronic textbook aimed at developing grammatical skills are presented in PDF worksheets, tests, texts and tasks on listening and speaking, and that allows to consolidate the acquired grammatical skills in speaking practice.

The introduction of new vocabulary, dialogues, texts into the structure of the lesson is accompanied by audio recordings so that foreign students can listen, repeat and independently read words and phrases checking this given pronunciation example.

The control system includes tests, which are an integral part of an electronic course, designed to automatically monitor the knowledge acquired by a student in the process of electronic learning. Moodle LMS has ample opportunities for automatic knowledge control. The following types of tests are presented in the electronic online course:

- 1) a test in a closed form (multiple choice), when a question has several answer options, of which one (or more) is correct;
- 2) a test for the selection of missing words, when it is necessary to select a word from the proposed list;
- 3) a reference test, when it is required to match the elements of two lists;
- 4) a test for filling in gaps in the text, the students are given a text fragment with missing words and a list of words-answers, which they must drag from the list to the correct places in the text to fill in the gaps;

5) a short answer (a line or a paragraph) when you need to write a word or phrase. This type of work is used in listening tasks, dictations, etc.

Tests are used to conduct current, intermediate and final control.

The development of communicative competence in at RFL lessons in conditions when a student is outside the country of the target language is associated with certain difficulties, therefore an important teacher's objective is to create real and specially made-up communicative situations using various methods of work. No less significant is the introduction of the students to the cultural values of the native speakers of the language. The cultural approach in the educational process "ensures that the students are introduced to the values of national and world culture, as well as to the traditions of specific ethnic societies and this prepares them to solve in communication not only general cultural tasks but also the professional ones" (Romanova, Amelina, Skorikova & Petrova, 2019).

When taking the course, foreigners encounter a significant amount of new vocabulary (terminological, sociocultural, neutral). Failure to understand a certain part of the educational material, long time spent on translating topical vocabulary into their native language negatively affects the students' motivation to study the discipline, weakening interest even among those who are curious and have an inquiring mind (Stepanova & Kovaleva & Amelina, 2019). In this regard, when creating an electronic training course, the teachers paid special attention to expanding the vocabulary of students by engaging various ways of vocabulary semantization.

In the electronic training course, texts of linguocultural topics are widely presented, they introduce the foreigners to Russian scientists and cultural figures, regions, cities, sights, Russian traditions, holidays, interesting events, etc. The texts are accompanied by photographs and video materials, post-text tasks and questions aimed at consolidating lexical and grammatical material, which will later be used in communicative tasks (see Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Fragment of the task with linguocultural orientation to train grammar patterns

In order to activate speech activity, video materials are used, with the help of which the studied grammar patterns can be illustrated. Films, video materials contribute to the implementation of the most important requirements of the communicative methodology - to present the process of language acquisition as comprehension of a living foreign language culture; individualize learning and development; motivate foreign students to speaking (Kigel, 2019). The undoubted advantage of video materials is their emotional impact on foreign students, therefore, special attention should be paid to the formation of foreigners' attitude towards what they watch and see. The use of video films also helps the development of various aspects of the mental activity of foreign students, first of all, attention and memory. When a group works on a video, the atmosphere of joint cognitive activity arises. To understand the contents of the video, foreign students need to make some effort. So involuntary attention turns into voluntary, its intensity affects the memorization process. The use of various channels of receiving information (auditory, visual, motor perception) has a positive effect on the strength of processing and 'capturing' regional and linguistic material.

When selecting video material for an electronic online course, the authors are guided by the following criteria:

- commensuration with the level of language training;
- taking into account the age characteristics and mentality of foreign students;
- availability of sociocultural and sociolinguistic information;
- reflection of modern realities in the video;

- presence of educational and development potential of the video material.

Both educational and authentic video materials are used as the didactic means at the stage of pre-university training. Moodle LMS allows to place these resources both in the form of attachments (the size cannot exceed 100 MB) and in the form of links to external resources; it is also possible to embed a video directly on the page with the educational material.

By far the most convenient service for watching videos is Youtube video hosting. Here you can find original didactic materials for teaching RFL, as well as authentic videos that the teacher can organically introduce into the structure of the lesson (fragments of news reports, weather forecasts, feature films and TV series, music videos, and so on). For example, upon reaching a basic level of Russian language proficiency in the electronic online course, the students are offered videos from the newsreel “Yeralash”; their length, meaningfulness, accessibility, plots’ completeness are methodologically and pedagogically appropriate for the videos to be used during classes at the initial stage of training, they allow to turn repeatedly to the video’s plot, develop communicative skills.

Conclusion

The electronic textbook, created by a team of authors from SWSU and integrated in “Electronic information and educational environment of SWSU. SWSU’s Courses” on Moodle platform, is aimed at the realization of teaching foreign students in accordance with the requirements necessary for mastering the Russian language within the framework of Elementary, Basic and First certification levels (A1, A2, B1). The electronic resource has ample opportunities for the presentation of didactic materials and is a tool that allows teachers to respond to the challenges of the modern world without reducing the quality of educational training. The undoubted advantages of the electronic course is the ability to integrate a variety of distance educational technologies and promptly edit the necessary educational resources, correct, change, supplement the materials in accordance with the needs and requests of foreign students, which provides an individual approach to learning and contributes to the effectiveness of the educational process.

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