BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH LANGUAGE - ONLINE STUDY SUPPORT MATERIAL

MJEŠOVITI PRISTUP PODUČAVANJU POSLOVNOG ENGLESKOG JEZIKA – ONLINE MATERIJAL

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Abstract: *The paper deals with the Business English teaching model based on blended learning to assist students in successfully mastering the course. The model is realized as a combination of a face-to-face environment and online learning in the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) on the B2 level of the Common European Framework of References for Languages. The course is focused on the development of business and economic terminology, reading and listening comprehension, grammar activities as well as work with up-to-date authentic audio-visual materials. Online support material is primarily intended for English language students of Polytechnic in Pozega.*

Key words: *online material, Business English, blended learning*

Sažetak: *Ovaj rad se bavi modelom podučavanja Poslovnog engleskog jezika (razina B2 prema Zajedničkom europskom referentnom okviru za jezike) zasnovanom na mješovitom pristupu učenju jezika. Cilj mu je pomoći studentima u uspješnom ovladavanju obrazovnog programa i temeljen je na kombiniranju tradicionalnog (f2f) učenja s učenjem uz pomoć Moodle Learning Management System(LMS) putem Interneta. Tako je olakšano usvajanje terminologije iz područja ekonomije i poslovanja, te sadrži različite zadatke slušanja s razumijevanjem, čitanja s razumijevanjem, provjeru, vježbanje i usvajanje gramatike, kao i rad s autentičnim audiovizualnim materijalima. Online materijal je namijenjen prvenstveno studentima Poslovnog engleskog jezika, ali i svima koji se u svom poslu služe terminologijom poslovnog engleskog jezika kao i budućim studentima iz Erasmus programa.*

Ključne riječi:*online materijal, Poslovni engleski jezik, mješovito učenje*

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1. Introduction

Teaching is essentially a design-based activity. [1] Nowadays, there are a few who doubt technology's ability to support teaching of languages. Language teachers have been keen adopters of new educational technology. They realised its potential for providing linguistic, interactive as well as cultural context which enables learners not only to communicate, but also to create, discuss, evaluate and negotiate with their peers and other speakers of the language.

The design of the blended language learning model for the subject of Business English Language at the Polytechnic in Pozega required from the teacher a range of skills and knowledge wider than their expertise in the subject area. The quality of e-learning is not something that can be delivered to the learner but is something that is co-developed by the learner and the provider during the teaching and learning process. [2] The design of teaching and learning interactions plays an important role for the quality of blended learning outcomes in which multiple media and different types of interactions are an integral part of the course. Our model of Business English teaching is designed with the aim of developing indirect teaching forms and methods, creation of electronic teaching aids and assessment materials to enhance the quality of study and self-study within the LMS Moodle software.

2. Background

Teaching and learning a foreign language is a challenging task both for students and teachers. Simply presenting certain knowledge to students does not result in learning. Learning involves conceptual change, evaluation, re-evaluation and reconstruction of a particular task. Therefore, the aim of teaching is to create the learning environment and situations in which the best opportunities for learning will be delivered to students and the design of these opportunities is the teacher's responsibility. Goodyear points out that facilitating learning is not sufficient. If what students do is the most important determination of what they learn then teachers need to provide stimulating learning tasks. Creating these tasks – ones that align with intended learning outcomes – is not easy. [3]

3. Objective

Modern online technologies represent a great potential for teachers who have to adapt to new technological trends and incorporate them into lesson plans. The blending depends on the needs of students, the nature of the learning task and the expected learning outcome. Hinkelman points out that the aim of blended learning is to span this continuum, defining or describing tasks that encompass a multitude of venues-classroom, home, laboratory, and field. [4]

The main objective of our blended language learning model is creating complex online study support material for the Business English Course. This course is

designed to support an interactive form of teaching by means of multimedia application. The use of information and communication technologies will facilitate easier access to education for students with increasing specialist demands in Business English language at the qualitatively higher level.

4. Design and development of material

At present Business English Language is taught in the form of contact teaching (once a week for 90 minutes) with the use of a textbook, handouts and additional audio-visual materials. The available time for lessons, as well as the large number of students in a group does not enable the use of authentic materials and additional grammar exercises. This is effectively offset by the online study support material which motivates students to improve their knowledge by doing extra work in weak areas, to do their homework and gives them an increased sense of autonomy.

The online study support material is also a valuable support material for distance studies since the students have limited opportunities to attend the lessons owing to their jobs, free time and distance limitations. Computer technology enables them to complete additional assignments, check their progress and get feedback at their own speed and in their free time. The course is focused on the development of business and economic terminology, on reading comprehension, listening comprehension and work with up-to-date authentic audio-visual materials. It is composed of fifteen module courses in the Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle [5] with the following topics:

● Sectors of Economy
● Types of Business
● Business across Cultures
● Business Ethics
● Business and the Environment
● Leadership
● Company Structure
● Brands
● Advertising
● Accounting and Finance
● International Law and International Trade
● Employment Law
● Management
● Business Communication (presentations, managing meetings, taking part in meetings, negotiating techniques ...)
● Writing (curriculum vitae, letter of application, letters, emails, press releases, faxes, agendas, reports, summaries ....)

The course is primarily focused on:
● introduction and development of specialist vocabulary
● reading comprehension (reading, connecting, predicting)
● listening comprehension
● work with authentic and up-to-date audio-visual language material (web pages, presentation of films, products, services, interviews)
● grammar practice activities
● self-testing exercises
● homework assignments
● final assessment

The content of the course is as follows:
● Lead-in
● Understanding vocabulary (exercises with key words and definitions)
● Before you read (reading, connecting, making predictions, quiz)
● Reading authentic material concerning the topic (a follow- up to the unit and work with the textbook)
● Autocorrective exercises such as filling in the gaps, true/false, multiple choice, word formation, matching, synonyms/antonyms, homonyms/homophones etc.)
● Listening comprehension exercises for recycling specialist vocabulary
● Video transcript with corresponding exercises to understand spoken English better
●On-line handing of written assignments (translations, letters, mind maps etc.) in some modules
● Grammar activities (review and recycling of grammar corresponding to tasks from the textbook)
● Self- testing exercises (exercises for training purposes with limited or unlimited number of possibilities or a credit test with just one try and time limit)
● Final assessment
● Read on (list of additional available resources)

Figure1: A page from Moodle Business English Course showing a lead-in quiz on culture
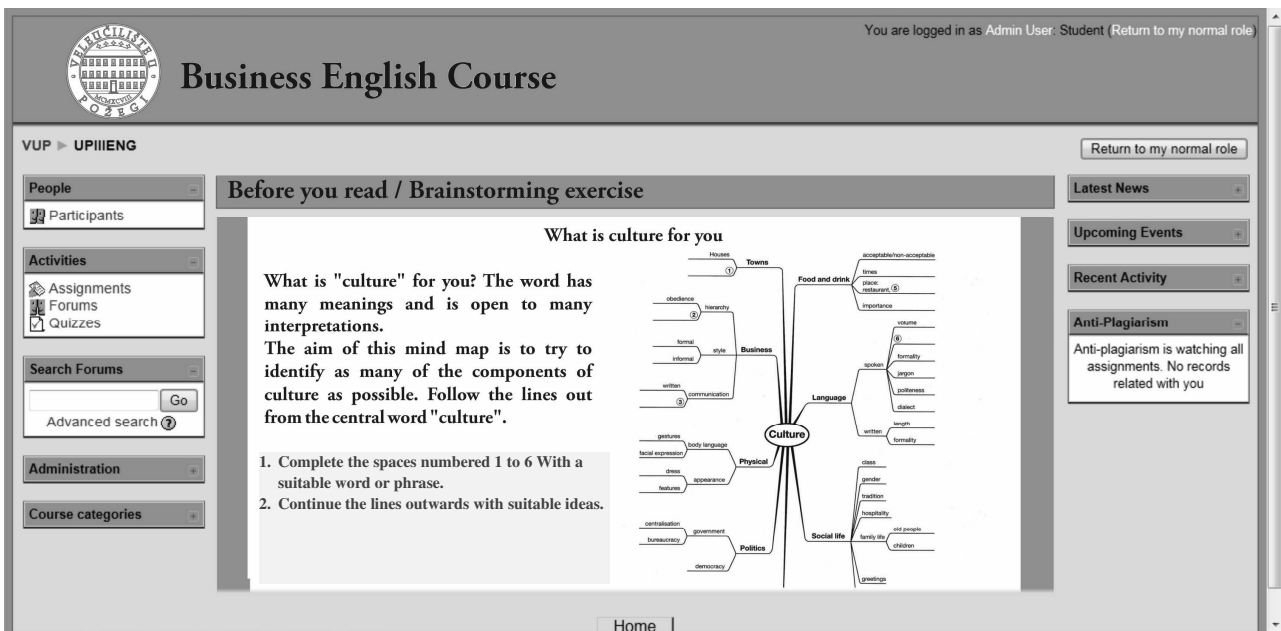
Figure 2: A page from Moodle Business English Course showing a before you read brainstorming exercise
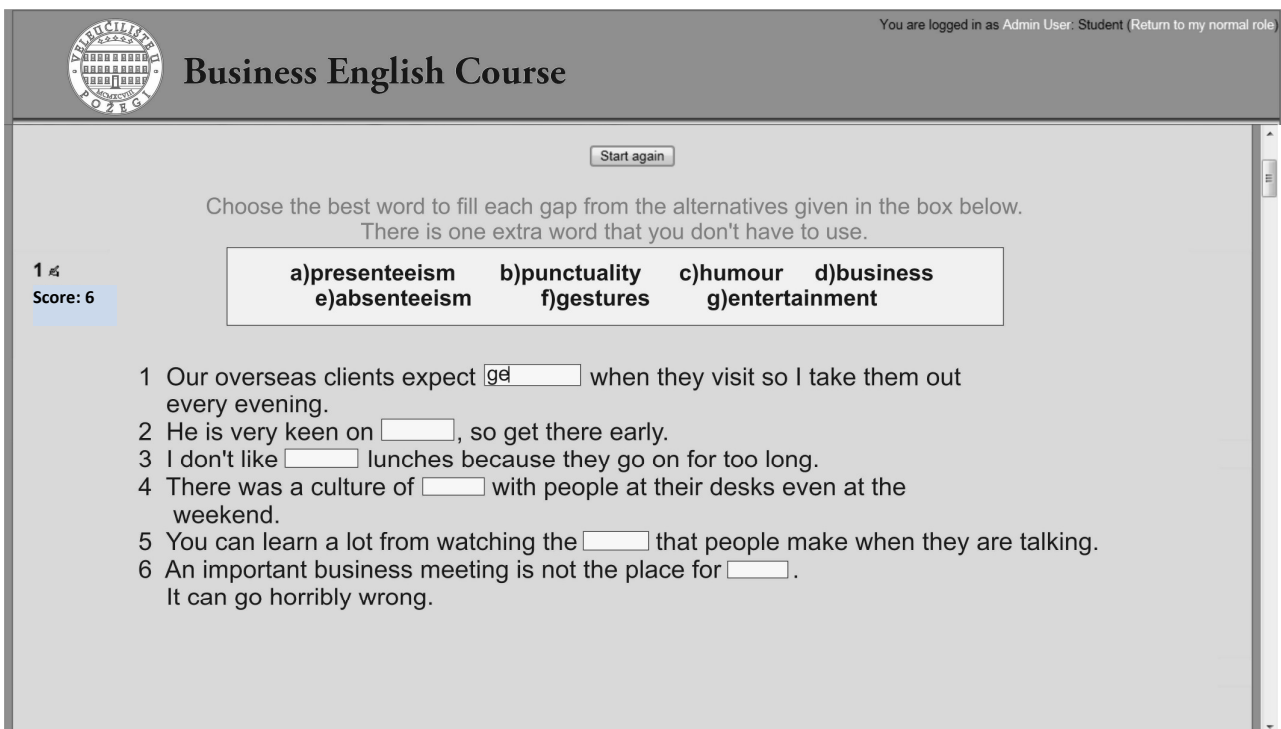

Figure 3: A page from Moodle Business English Course showing a fill-in gap exercise intended for students' vocabulary practice

Figure 4: A page from Moodle Business English Course showing a link with a video on the Internet with a listening comprehension exercise
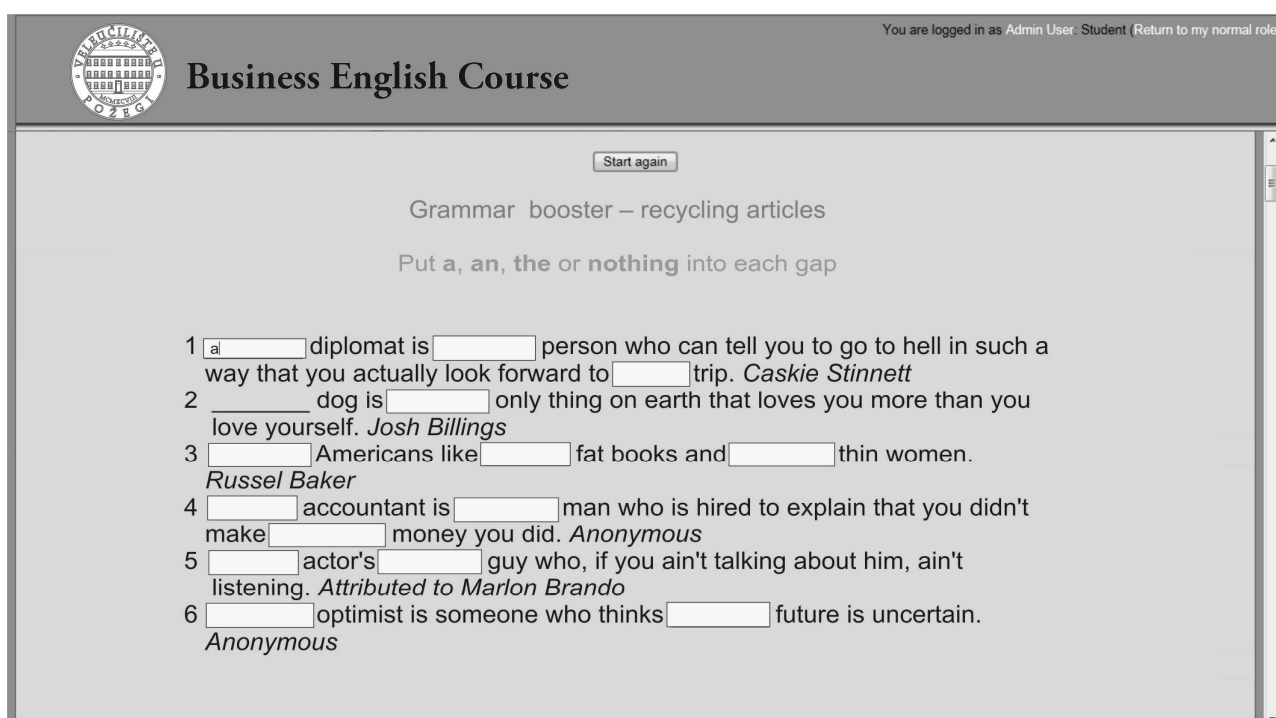

Figure 5: A page from Moodle Business English Course showing a grammar booster exercise to recycle articles

5. Conclusion

Online study support components for Business English Course are designed to complement the existing textbook and extend contact with students. They enable the

teacher to distribute some of the course activities throughout the semester, with students accessing course material and performing certain tasks online.

Meaningful exercises give deeper insight into the areas the students need to practice more, encourage them to analyse what they are doing while at the same time the automatic grading of activities gives them immediate feedback on their work and keeps track of their progress.

The students can access a range of interactive activities, tasks and tests when they are online at home or in the computer lab, in fact, whenever and wherever they have access to the Internet.

This online support material can serve not only the students of Polytechnic in Pozega but also the students of other polytechnics and universities with a similar curriculum. It increases the options for greater and more independent, enriched learning with flexible solutions in a learning environment.

6. References

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