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## MOODLE-BASED COURSE AS A TOOL TO SUPPORT TEACHING ESP CLASS ONLINE

*The article explores the transformative impact of technology on education, specifically focusing on the role of Moodle Learning Management System in refining English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The aim of the research is to examine the benefits of a Moodle-based course as an online instrument to support learning English for Specific Purposes and to study students' feedback regarding Moodle course effectiveness.*

*The widespread use of platforms like Moodle in higher education, its benefits in facilitating teacher-student interaction and managing learning processes, and its alignment with contemporary teaching strategies are highlighted. The article provides an overview of the benefits of using Moodle in ESP courses, supported by empirical evidence and student feedback, emphasizing its role in modernizing and enriching the educational process. The advantages of Moodle Course Management Platform for teachers as an efficient organizational and assessment tool are described. Moodle supports course planning and management, assists in teaching different learning styles online, helps cope with the problems that can arise. The study also highlights the significance of the shift from conventional teaching methods to more learner-centered, available due to technologically driven educational environments. Flexible learning, accessibility, and a higher level of student autonomy are among the most appreciated benefits for students.*

*The results of the survey in the form of a questionnaire helped to summarize the feedback on the effectiveness of the Moodle course from 2nd-year Software Engineering students taking the ESP course at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. The respondents emphasized the course relevance to their future professions, its ability to improve language skills, and its practical orientation. Students confirmed high levels of motivation, autonomy, and engagement with the course content. Moodle's role in complementing traditional classes, fostering language and problem-solving abilities is also stated. It is stressed that educators need to be ready to adapt and integrate new teaching methods to address evolving learning needs in the digital era.*

**Key words:** Moodle-based course, teaching methods, flexible learning, motivation, autonomy, problem-solving.

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## КУРС НА ПЛАТФОРМІ MOODLE ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ ДЛЯ ПІДТРИМКИ ОНЛАЙН ВИКЛАДАННЯ ESP

*У статті досліджується трансформаційний вплив технологій на освіту, особливо зосереджуючись на ролі системи управління навчанням Moodle у вдосконаленні курсів англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням (ESP). Мета дослідження – вивчити переваги курсу на базі платформи Moodle як онлайн-інструменту для підтримки вивчення англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням і відгуки студентів щодо ефективності курсу в Moodle.*

*Підкреслено широке використання у вищій освіті таких платформ, як Moodle, її переваги для полегшення взаємодії викладачів і студентів та управління навчальними процесами, а також узгодженість із сучасними стратегіями навчання. У статті подано огляд переваг використання Moodle у курсах ESP, підкріплений емпіричними даними та відгуками студентів, підкреслюючи роль платформи у модернізації та збагаченні навчального процесу. Описано переваги Moodle платформи для викладачів як ефективного інструменту організації навчання та оцінювання. Moodle підтримує планування та управління курсами, дає змогу викладати онлайн студентам із різними стилями навчання, допомагає впоратися з проблемами, які можуть виникнути. Дослідження також підкреслює важливість переходу від звичайних методів навчання до більш орієнтованих на студента, доступних завдяки технологічно керованим освітнім середовищам. Гнучке навчання, доступність і вищий рівень студентської автономії є одними з найбільш цінних переваг для студентів.*

*Результати опитування у формі анкет, заповнених студентами 2 курсу спеціальності «Програмна інженерія», які вивчають курс ESP в Чернівецькому національному університеті імені Юрія Федьковича, допомогли узагальнити відгуки про ефективність курсу Moodle. Респонденти підкресливали відповідність курсу їхнім майбутнім професіям, його здатність покращувати мовні навички та практичну спрямованість. Студенти підтвердили високий рівень мотивації, самостійності та залучення до змісту курсу. Також зазначено роль Moodle у доповненні традиційних занять, розвитку мови та здібностей до вирішення проблем. Наголошується, що освітяни повинні бути готові адаптувати та інтегрувати нові методи навчання, щоб задовольнити нові навчальні потреби в епоху цифрових технологій.*

**Ключові слова:** курс на базі Moodle, методи навчання, гнучке навчання, мотивація, автономія, вирішення проблем.

**Introduction.** Contemporary technologies, especially the Internet, have given a chance to use many interesting tools to improve the quality of the learning process assisting teachers to meet present-day challenges under current circumstances. Blended learning has emerged to facilitate student-centered learning, which has led to supplementing teaching by technologically driven educational environments which are more learner-centered, collaborative, innovative and largely appreciated by learners. Modern technologies are an integral part of today's ESP training giving students a break from traditional activities, yet reinforcing their language skills through immersion into the foreign language environment. When discussing organizing the process of teaching online, most often we mention video conferencing and communication tools, such as Google Meet, Zoom, Skype and others, in combination with homework management and online learning systems. Popular global education networks include Moodle, e-Khool, Blackboard Learn, Canvas, D2L Brightspace, Schoology, Google Classroom, Edmodo, Adobe Captivate Prime, SABA Cloud (Linkedin, 2023). Google Classroom, which can be used to create virtual classrooms and share curriculum while also assigning work, Canvas, an open-source cloud-based platform for managing online courses, learning materials and communication about skill development and learning achievements, and Moodle, online program, that allows to post and grade assignments via modules, appear to be among the most popular learning platforms with institutions of higher education in Ukraine.

Why Moodle? Among the variety of platforms providing tools for virtual education, Moodle is one of the most popular Learning Management Systems (LSM) in the world, presently with 46,546,062 courses (comparing to 34,827,717 courses in March 2021), 399,504,084 users (259,000,000 users in March 2021) and 237 countries applying Moodle-based tools for educational purposes also being on a priority list with Ukrainian institutions of higher education (1188 registered sites in Ukraine) (Moodle Statistics, 2023). Moodle is an effective way to organize teaching-learning process and teacher-stu-

dent interaction. The platform is attractive both for teachers and students as it is modular, object-oriented, dynamic learning environment. It is easy to use – no need to possess any programming knowledge, free access to resources via the web is always available, it is a secure environment with automatic backup. Moodle supports interaction between students and tutors and at the same time facilitates collaboration between students allowing them to pursue independent learning pathways. Some Moodle activities, that can get the teaching-learning process very far, include sharing online handouts and visual aids (sample audios, videos, home reading assignments, etc.), creating various forms of tests, assessment and feedback on tasks, learner progress tracking, interaction organized via forums, chats, Wikis and glossaries.

**Analysis of recent research.** Modern technologies give students a break from traditional in-class activities, yet reinforce their language learning skills with the activities suggested via online courses. Hutchinson and Waters suggest that the teaching of English for Specific Purposes appeared as a response to the needs and focused on the learners. Instead of learning English for prestige, they learned it for work reasons. The authors determine the guiding principle of ESP as: "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need" (Hutchinson et al., 1987). Theoretical and practical approaches to the application of information and communication technologies in education in general and the use of LMS platforms in teaching ESP in particular are widely discussed in Ukraine and abroad. Hodges et al. (Hodges et al., 2020) examined the differences between emergency remote teaching and online learning and why it is important to understand those differences when evaluating emergency remote teaching. Bates, the author of eleven books in the field of online learning and distance education, shares his vision on the online learning resources, distance learning challenges, and reflections on the future of open and distance education on his website (Bates, 2023). The advantages and drawbacks of distance learning were described in the research by Humeniuk et al., where different platforms used for remote learn-

ing were analysed and their pluses and minuses distinguished (Humeniuk et al., 2021). Westerlund, R., Chugai, O., Petrenko, S., and Zuyenok studied online English teaching and learning experience in higher education institutions in Ukraine through pandemics and wartime during the period of 2019–2023 (Westerlund et al., 2023). Also, ESP practitioners (Rudnitska et al., 2018) investigated the problem of students' self-study organization by means of Moodle system in the process of foreign language learning and revealed (Chugai et al., 2023) peculiarities of students' self-regulation in online ESP learning.

**The aim of the article** is to examine the benefits of a Moodle-Based Course as an online instrument to support teaching / learning English for Specific Purposes and to study students' opinions regarding Moodle course effectiveness.

Methods of analysis of the methodological sources, observation, deduction and induction, systematization and generalization were used. The survey in the form of a questionnaire, created on the Moodle platform, was conducted to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the Moodle course from 2nd-year Software Engineering students studying the ESP course at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. The collected results were analyzed and summarized.

**Discussion and results.** Let's dwell on the advantages of Moodle as an excellent Course Management Platform for teachers as organizers of teaching-learning process, facilitators and mentors. Moodle can handle a lot of the tasks, teachers do, namely, putting up timetables, sharing syllabi, arranging discussions, presenting videos of new material, organizing tests, collecting marks, providing feedback to students, guiding students to do their own learning, as well as many more. Being an open source, completely secure solution for e-learning Moodle is among the most appreciated free online learning management systems with educators. If we consider course design purposes, Moodle is a fantastic organizational tool especially when we start course planning and management. The following tasks become much easier:

- organizing courses, the way we want them to be displayed;
- creating and managing course content (developing assignments, exercises, and tests, formatting text, adding media and images easily with an imbedded editor, providing access to online quizzes, surveys, videos);
- supporting students' groupwork and peer review (work in chats, forums, wikis, glossaries, engagement with database activities, various assignments, etc.);
- providing students' journal and document submission, assessing students' knowledge and sharing grades and ratings;

- keeping track of academic calendar, course deadlines and group meetings (notifications make it possible for users to receive automatic alerts on new assignments and deadlines);

- navigating Moodle interface on both desktop and mobile devices.

Thus, it should be admitted that Moodle is convenient and allows to manage content easily. We can create a course from a scratch, where our students will access information, help and advice. Here we can identify the course goals (skills and knowledge students have to obtain by the end of the course), content (choose topics to cover), tools and methods to achieve the goals, plan assessment and examinations.

Moodle also lets us make use of synchronous and asynchronous methods of teaching. Specifically, synchronous learning is a type of group learning where everyone learns at the same time. On the contrary, asynchronous learning is more self-directed, and the student decides the time that he will learn. Asynchronous learning allows to learn on one's own schedule. Students can access and complete tasks in attached files (readings, homework and other learning materials) at any time during a set period. A big benefit to asynchronous classes is flexibility as students don't always need to be online at the same time as their instructor or classmates (Scheiderer, 2022).

Besides, Moodle can assist in teaching different learning styles online, meaning it provides the means to meet the needs of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners, and those who learn best when reading and writing. For instance, charts, graphs, PowerPoint presentations, lesson outlines can be included in the course, when teaching visual learners. For auditory learners verbal instructions, audio and video materials, songs, podcasts etc. should be incorporated. Learners with a strong reading / writing preference learn best through words, so they can find loads of written materials shared in the course, links to additional learning tools, a variety of written assignments, projects, chats and forums. Kinesthetic learners will benefit from creating something and sharing a photo or a video of the achievements with their groupmates.

Also, there are options which can help decide how we want to deal with the problems that can arise (attendance issues, requests to postpone deadlines, plagiarism issues). For instance, availability of the imbedded plagiarism checker in most cases prevents students from copy-pasting information from Google while doing their assignment. It is highly advisable to discuss all these questions with students during the first lesson of the course, besides it is a good idea to include this information into the course syllabus and share it with the class. Often, we have to cope

with technical challenges during live online classes, when technology doesn't work as we have planned. Here, a Moodle course will be a backup plan for when technology may fail. For example, when we have an unexpected power outage, we can ask our students via messenger to go to their Moodle course and complete a certain task, that we have designed for such a situation.

Besides, Moodle can assist to assess students' knowledge, provide grades and ratings, create tests, which are a traditional assessment tool. Questions can take many forms: to choose one or more correct answers, fill in the blanks, match the terms and their definitions, and so on. The order of questions and answer options can be randomized, so the test for each student will be unique. Essays are among the most popular methods of quality assessment. They encourage students to explore their feelings, and thoughts while testing their overall understanding of the topic. Drag-And-Drop task is a type of assessment that shows the student's ability to connect information and apply knowledge to solve practical problems. Moodle allows to give detailed feedback to our students on specific areas of language performance. Besides, all the marks can be collected in an online gradebook. Moodle also provides some basic statistics which teachers can use to see how well their tests are working, and to improve them if necessary.

The simplest way to use Moodle is to post class notes for future revision or self-study, as well as supportive materials (reading, audio, video, useful links) and all sorts of assignments, then to collect these assignments, to create tests, assess them and provide feedback. Though several Moodle-supported advantageous strategies of teaching an ESP class online may be suggested. Here are some tips to make use of supercharged instructions. Asking your students if everything is clear after giving instructions on what to do is not of much use. Students may be shy or unwilling to admit that they don't understand something. Some of the ideas to make sure that instructions are clear for students and how to turn them into language learning activities were suggested by Chris Roland in his webinar "Talking to teenagers in the English language classroom" (Roland, 2019):

- listen-pair-share – give your instructions and ask students to pair up and repeat the instructions as close to the original as possible;
- invite a volunteer to repeat back the instructions to you and the class;
- video instructions – ask your students to watch the video and explain what they should do;
- guessing – ask to look at the task and ask what they think they should be doing;

- interaction with Web Content – don't just add a link to a website, if you add it to a forum, you can get some fantastic language production;

- "Debate", a newly released Moodle plugin, allows learners to take sides in a discussion and actively express their opinions (Cooch, 2021);

- actively use online chat and select moderators from among students;

- use interactive tools – surveys and quizzes are good ways to engage students.

Considering the advantages for students, number one on the list is flexible learning and student autonomy. These are the greatest benefits of e-learning as students can learn anywhere, any time, and at their own pace. With constant developments in Internet technology and communication channels, students have access to quality materials in the form of videos from top educational institutions. With the Moodle App, learners can access all your content, submit activities and complete assignments from their mobile devices, and can continue learning even if they are offline, that facilitates independence and motivation. Moodle Platform is a tool that handles all aspects of the learning process for ESP students, in particular:

- enhances teaching with online supplementary activities that boost both motivation and outcome;

- provides links to websites relevant to a course and their specialty;

- allows students to reflect on their learning through a blog, a forum or a journal, thus, increases confidence and responsibility;

- creates an opportunity to work in teams to co-author documents using a Wiki tool (supporting cooperation and team work skills);

- can set up a list of things for students to do before coming to a lesson;

- reminds about deadlines, which is an additional means of teacher-student communication, as well as a way to raise responsibility and persistence;

- provides statistics, that is advantageous both for a teacher and a learner, as it helps to keep track of attendance, achieved results, tendencies, etc.

Collaborative learning develops higher level thinking skills, actively builds understanding, promotes student-faculty interaction, increases student retention, and encourages student responsibility for learning. To support collaboration Moodle suggests e-mail notifications, discussion, games, feedback and forum software.

Flipped classroom and student-centered approach should be also mentioned. A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, where students are introduced to content at home and work on live problem-solving during class time

(TeachThought Staff, 2014). This is the reverse of the more common practice of introducing new content in class, then assigning homework and projects to be completed independently at home. In this approach, face-to-face interaction is mixed with independent study, usually via technology. In a common Flipped Classroom scenario, students can watch pre-recorded videos at home, then come to class to do the assignments armed with some background knowledge. It is a learner-centered approach, as students get a chance to study the topic deeply at their own pace, and are given meaningful and real-life activities in the classroom. They can receive immediate feedback if they study on the platform with automatic check-up. Thus, they receive assessment more often, which boosts their confidence and self-reliance. With Flipped Classroom learning students get ready at home and apply their knowledge in class. They can practice language skills, guided or unguided by the teacher, participate in discussions, debate, present, do peer assessment and review in the classroom.

Another important benefit of a Moodle course is motivation enhancement. Some studies indicate that language learners appreciate blended learning programs due to flexibility and autonomy (Goertler et al., 2012), (Larsen, 2012).

The survey in the form of a Moodle-based questionnaire conducted at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University has proved that Moodle is an effective form of the educational process and teacher-student interaction. 64 questionnaires were filled out by the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students specializing in Software Engineering taking the ESP course. Students were asked to provide feedback on their Moodle course effectiveness.

In the first section of the survey the participants pointed out (see Figure 1) that their ESP Moodle course focuses on interesting topics connected with their future profession, helps them improve their English language skills and is practice-oriented.

The first question in the second section of the questionnaire was: “Do you find this course: useful / not useful, interesting / not interesting, motivating / not motivating?”. 64 students, which makes up 100% of the respondents, noted that their Moodle course is both useful and interesting. 59 students (92% of the sample audience) mentioned that it motivates them to learn the language. To the question: “Does it help to develop your English language skills?” all participants answered “Yes”. 58 students pointed out the course facilitates their autonomy and independence, 2 gave a negative



Fig. 1. Moodle course effectiveness

Questionnaire on Moodle Course Effectiveness						
	useful	not useful	interesting	not interesting	motivating	not motivating
1) Do you find this course ...?	64	-	64	-	59	5
	yes		no		not sure	
2) Does it help to develop your English language skills?	64		-		-	
3) Does this course facilitate your autonomy and independence as a learner?	58		2		4	
3) Do you access this course from your mobile device?	45		19			
4) Describe this course in 2–3 words / adjectives.	Adjectives used by more than 1 respondent: <i>interesting, useful, informative, helpful, practical, encouraging, motivating, cognitive, diverse, convenient, fine, intensive, complex, developing, thought-provoking</i>					

Fig. 2. Student feedback on the effectiveness of the Moodle course

answer and 4 admitted they are not sure. Finally, the learners were asked to describe their Moodle course in ESP in 2–3 words / adjectives. The adjectives, used more than one time, included: *interesting, useful, informative, helpful, practical, encouraging, motivating, cognitive, diverse, convenient, fine, intensive, complex, developing, thought-provoking* (see Figure 2).

In the third section the respondents were offered to share their vision as for the Moodle course effectiveness. 36 comments were submitted. Summarizing the comments provided it was mentioned that the course helps study professional English vocabulary, train reflection skills and increase current level of language proficiency. Some students mentioned that the course helps both develop English language skills and to learn more about programming and electronics, learn technical vocabulary that helps use English language sources more effectively. A few survey participants suggested the course facilitates their autonomy and independence as sometimes they don't understand during the offline lesson what they should

do as homework and they have to ask, and with the Moodle course they can reread the task and instructions several times. Also, there is sometimes vocabulary they don't know, but can check it as they have enough time. Majority of the respondents mentioned this course facilitates their independence and problem-solving skills.

**Conclusion.** Moodle platform appeared beneficial both for teachers and learners, as Moodle-based courses supplement online classes with success, boost motivation and autonomy, form professional English language skills with their further application. Students pointed out that their Moodle course facilitates independence and autonomy, motivates to learn the language and fosters the development of language and problem-solving skills. Still, it is important for teachers to be ready to provide students with necessary tools for learning and self-evaluation, so new opportunities and challenges for teacher development have to be explored and applied, as new teaching methods and learning outcomes should be more relevant to the new needs of the digital world.

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