IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BLENDED LEARNING TECHNOLOGY IN THE SOUTH URAL STATE UNIVERSITY

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Level system of foreign language learning is a widespread world practice. It is successfully implemented by leading universities around the world. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in blended learning that combines online and face-to-face classroom practices. Since 2016, South Ural State University (SUSU) has been implementing this practice. The main goal of which is to transform the university into a SMART one in order to form the basis for the region's sustainable development and make a significant contribution to education and science of the whole world. The key aspects of blended learning system in SUSU are: the development of individual activity style depending on the initial level of language proficiency; placement tests development in order to form groups by levels with online support for them; working out the appropriate score-rating system for monitoring students' progress at each level. Also, for the first time the university has applied the final results assessment practice in accordance with the international exams format such as KET, PET and IELTS.

The aim of our research is to study the satisfaction level of students of non-linguistic specialties from the quality of education and to analyze the implementation process of the blended learning technology.

During the research the following tasks were set and solved: 1. The experience of using blended learning in educational process was analyzed; 2. The comparative analysis of the initial and final level of language proficiency for the students of non-linguistic specialties was made; 3. The features of A1–B2 online support were described; 4. The types of classroom and extra-curricular activities were considered (the percentage of independent and classroom work); 5. The level of satisfaction among students of non-linguistic specialties from the quality of education in the context of the educational program and the implementation of the blended learning system was analyzed.

In conclusion it should be noted that this research has shown that the implementation of blended learning technology in educational process has a positive impact on students' learning. As a result of it, the level of students` satisfaction has become higher.

Keywords: blended learning technology; score-rating system, independent work, online support.

Introduction

The main goal of the development program of the SUSU is to transform the university into a SMART university, which will become the basis of the sustainable development of the region, as well as make a significant contribution to the education and science of the world.

In 2018, the South Ural State University for the first time entered the ranking of the best universities in the world, QS World University Rankings. The best universities in the world are determined annually by the company by a number of criteria. Specialists assess the academic reputation of the university, scientific activity, reputation among employers and internationalization.

The South Ural State University implements the following key projects: the Lingua program, the office of academic writing, the center of elite education, the advanced language training at the bachelor's degree program and many others.

The training model was revised during "Deep language learning at the bachelor's level" project. Prior to the development of this project, academic classes were conducted in the traditional form, and no division of student groups into levels was assumed. After the integration of advanced language training into the educational process, it was decided to use not only blended learning, but also the division of groups into levels, which will allow effective mastering of a foreign language. It is blended learning that allows better mastering of foreign language, as it is an educational approach that combines face-to-face learning with online learning [2, 4, 5]. The online environment gives students the oppor-

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tunity to control the pace, time, place and path of learning. It helps to develop planning skills, self-control and self-regulation giving freedom [1, 3]. Teaching with a teacher is an important part of blended learning. The role of the teacher varies depending on the students' needs. They need a tutor, counselor, specialist [7, 9]. Integrating the learning experience online and with the teacher is an active format of work at the lesson. This format should be more focused on practice, which is important when learning a foreign language [8]. The most convenient format – in small groups. Therefore, blended learning provides the division of student groups into levels for better mastery of foreign language. It should be noted that these two types of learning are interconnected in teaching process.

Materials and Methods

In our survey, we studied the implementation of level learning of a foreign language and analyzed the satisfaction of students of non-language specialties of the South Ural State University with level foreign language teaching in the context of blended language learning. This part of our study is devoted to studying and analyzing the satisfaction of non-language students with the quality of education in the context of the educational program and implementation of the blended learning project.

To achieve the above goal, we used a method of analysis of performance data and a method of questionnaires.

An analysis of the overall number of students allowed us to accurately determine the percentage of students who have successfully mastered the subject.

The survey method is the most acceptable and effective for assessing student satisfaction, as, from our point of view, it helps to reach a wide audience to obtain objective and reliable results.

The questionnaire allows you to collect information in a short period of time, reach a large target audience and get reasonable answers, because the questionnaire is conducted anonymously. The main reason for choosing this method was the ability to achieve all the goals of the study: to assess the attitude of students to mixed learning, to analyze the development of language skills within the course, to learn the degree of students' satisfaction with the quality of education in the context of blended level learning. An important factor is the fact that the way the results of the questionnaire are processed seems to be the most accessible.

The implementation of level education at the South Ural State University was carried out in several stages.

1. Choosing of teaching materials

The teaching is based on Cambridge University press Touchstone textbooks (2nd edition). This course fully meets the requirements of level language learning, contains a variety of topics and exercises aimed at practicing lexical, grammatical and conversational skills in accordance with the level of the student.

2. Development of a score-rating system

On the basis of this course, a score-rating system was developed, which includes all aspects of English language learning at the university. The student receives points for classroom classes, homework, independent work online, project assignments and final certification activities. Thus, the classroom work comprised 12% of points during the term, homework – 12%, online work – 12%, project work – 10%, tests and control works – 14%, exam – 40%.

Homework consists of doing tasks in a Workbook and online, writing blogs on the topics of the course; Project work involves the implementation of practical instructions to create a presentation, poster presentation, video or role plays using studied lexical, grammatical material on the topics; tests and control works of the Touchstone course and test exam in the international format of KET (for level A1, A2), PET (for level A2, B1) and IELTS (for B2). Thus, independent work is 34%, classroom work – 66%.

3. Changes in the structure of foreign language learning at the university

At the beginning of the academic year, students are invited to pass a placement test, which includes three aspects: reading, writing, listening to determine the level of English proficiency. Students are then divided into groups according to the test result. Each teacher has access to online courses for students and can add and remove participants, check written assignments, identify deadlines for various assignments, monitor student progress. Students are able to track their progress on their own, re-examine the material or learn something extra.

4. Designing and development of our own online course

Since previously learning a foreign language at the university did not include work online, a methodical accompaniment to each level of A1–B2 was created. Methodical accompaniment is an online course with the material which

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covers topics of the main textbook. Each online course contains a variety of exercises to develop lexical and grammatical material, as well as references to additional sources that students can use to prepare project assignments. The goal was to improve students' motivation, autonomy and provide online support thus implementing the concept of blended learning.

Results and discussion

The survey was conducted remotely with the help of the Docs.Google.com and was offered to students of the 1st and 2nd courses of non-language specialties of the South Ural State University at the age of 17–19 years. These students (about 150 people) are enrolled in a blended level education program. The proposed questionnaire included both open and closed questions, as we needed to learn how students evaluate certain criteria of the program, as well as to analyze their attitude to the quality of blended learning level education. The analysis of the questionnaire data was done manually [6].

We analyzed in detail the results of the survey. In order to determine the level of satisfaction with the quality of education, 147 undergraduate students of the first and second courses of non-language specialties were interviewed. The data were presented as a percentage and the most frequently reported responses were taken into account.

To meet the challenges and achieve the goal of our study, we offered the following questionnaire:

1. Do you think it is appropriate to divide students into levels when learning a foreign language?

To this question 136 students (92.5%) responded positively by confirming the feasibility of level education while learning a foreign language.

2. Was your level of foreign language proficiency turned right before the start of your studies?

We consider the use of the placement test to be one of the most important moments in learning. If the level is inaccurate, then it will be unpleasant and uninformative to study English, especially in group classes. According to the responses, 109 students (74%) had a correctly determined level of foreign language proficiency.

3. Do you like the combination of face-to-face and online classes?

Blended learning is an educational approach that combines teacher-to-face learning with online learning. 87 students (60%) liked this form of study, 32 students (21%) said negatively and for 28 students (19%) it was difficult to answer.

4. What skills have you noted more?

The students noted that the following skills were more developed. The results are presented in Fig. 1.

We would like to note that students appreciate not only academic knowledge, but also the level of communicative development. It is soft skills that are responsible for successful participation in the workflow.

5. Are there enough training sessions to learn a foreign language effectively?

The total workload of the "Foreign Language" discipline is 540 hours, which includes 3 semesters of study of 180 hours each, with 5 hours of classroom classes per week. This
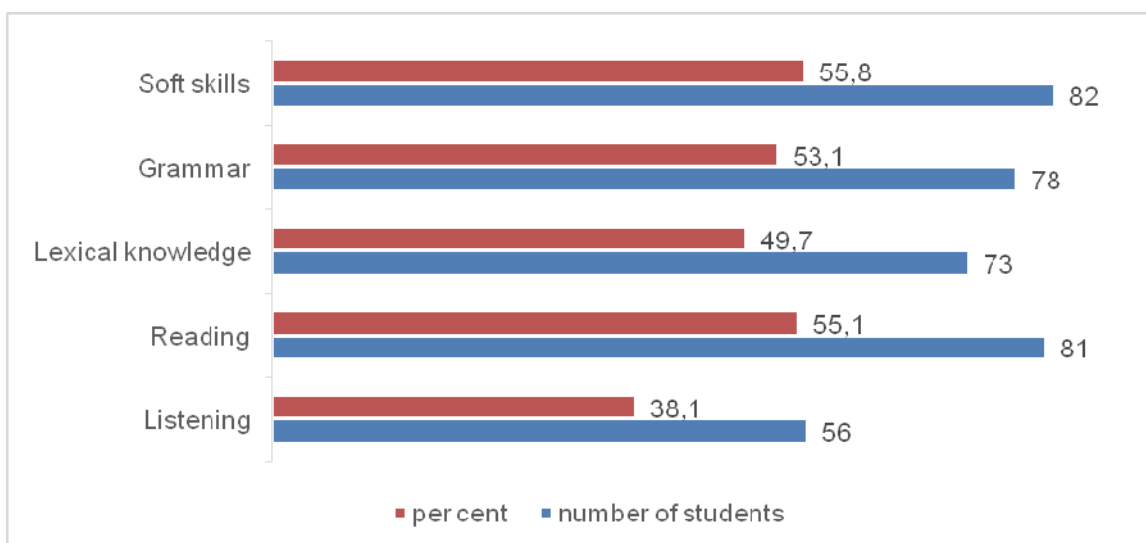

Fig. 1. The results of the questionnaire

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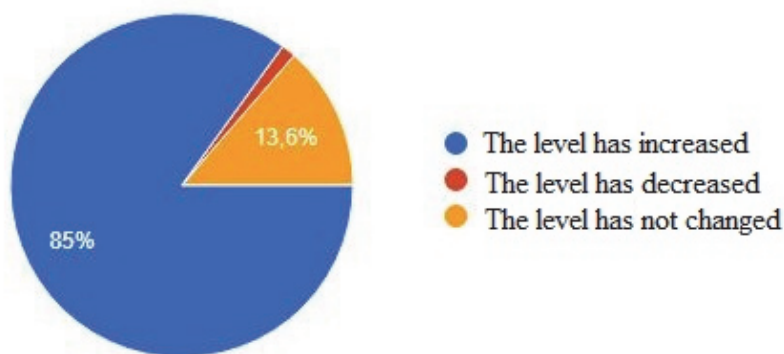Educational Sciences. 2021, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 32–38**

Fig. 2. Students' level of foreign language proficiency

number of classes was considered sufficient by 101 students (69%), for 24 students or 16% it was not enough and 22 students (15%) were not ready to answer.

6. How has your level of foreign language proficiency changed compared to the beginning of learning?

The diagram shows the students' responses as a percentage. 125 students (85%) believe that their level of foreign language proficiency has improved compared to the beginning of their studies (Fig. 2).

7. Distribute the types of works depending on how they are effective for you.

After analyzing the data, we are presenting a list of those tasks that students consider the most effective for retention of auditory material.

• Dialogues, speaking, oral quiz 64%
• Listening 49%
• Project task 44%
• Vocabulary check 37%
• Reading texts 28%
• Online work 25%

8. What would you change in teaching a foreign language at university?

The majority of students (73%) said that they are satisfied with this method of teaching and would not change anything. Some students would pay even more attention to speaking (10%) and dialogues (8%). They suggested to have more communication with native speakers (5%) and foreign students (3%).

To compare the discipline learning data, the results of 3,352 students (1,676 undergraduate students of non-blended learning groups studying traditional program and 1,676 undergraduate students of blended learning groups) were chosen and analyzed over a period of two previous terms.

We considered the students' performance from the control group (the students who were

not engaged in classes of blended learning). The control group consisted of 1,676 students (726 first year students and 950 second year students. Of these, 522 (72%) students successfully mastered the first year of study and 694 students (73%) and 694 students (73%) successfully mastered the second year of study. In total, out of 1,676 students 1,216 students have successfully mastered English, which equals 72.5%

The students' progress from the experimental groups (the groups with blended learning) was analyzed during four terms. The total number of first- and second year students was 1,027. All of them were enrolled in blended learning groups. In 2018, out of 726 first year students, 608 students (83.7%) and, out of 950 second year students, 722 students (76%) successfully finished the term and changed their level of English knowledge. As a result, from 1,676 students of level education 1,330 students have successfully mastered the discipline, representing 79.3% of the total number. This is 6.8% more than with traditional training model. Thus, the implementation of level and blended learning has helped to increase the proportion of students who have successfully mastered the discipline. The data are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1

Students' Progress

	Group 1 Traditional Learning	Group 2 Blended Learning
Total Number of Students	1676	1676
Passed Exams	1216	1330
Passed Exams, %	72.5%	79.3%

Conclusion

Statistical analysis allows us to summarize definite data and draw certain conclusions. Survey data shows that students are quite satisfied

with the given system of education (it's approximately 80% of the respondents). It means that they consider division of academic groups into different levels of education and combination online and face-to-face classroom practices being reasonable as their language level has increased. And survey analysis proved it as we have 85% of students with the improved language level. Thus, we can conclude that blended learning is effectively implemented, as it contributes to positive changes in the educational process, which in turn affects the improvement of the quality of education.

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ВНЕДРЕНИЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ СМЕШАННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ В ЮЖНО-УРАЛЬСКОМ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОМ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

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Уровневая система обучения иностранному языку является широко распространенной мировой практикой. Она успешно реализуется в полном объеме ведущими университетами мира. В последние годы наблюдается растущий интерес к смешанному обучению, которое сочетает в себе онлайн и очную аудиторную практику. С 2016 года эту практику внедряет Южно-Уральский государственный университет (ЮУрГУ), главная цель которого – превратить университет в «умный», чтобы сформировать основу устойчивого развития региона и внести весомый вклад в образование и науку всего мира. Ключевыми аспектами системы смешанного обучения в ЮУрГУ являются: выработка индивидуального

стиля деятельности в зависимости от начального уровня владения языком; разработка тестовых заданий для формирования групп по уровням с онлайн-поддержкой для них; разработка соответствующей балльно-рейтинговой системы мониторинга успеваемости студентов на каждом уровне. Кроме того, впервые университет применил практику оценки итоговых результатов в соответствии с форматом международных экзаменов, таких как KET, PET и IELTS.

Целью нашего исследования является изучение уровня удовлетворенности студентов неязыковых специальностей качеством образования и анализ процесса внедрения технологии смешанного обучения при изучении иностранного языка.

В ходе исследования были поставлены и решены следующие задачи: проанализирован опыт использования смешанного обучения в учебном процессе; проведен сравнительный анализ начального и конечного уровня владения языком у студентов неязыковых специальностей; были описаны характеристики онлайн-поддержки А1–В2; были рассмотрены виды аудиторной и внеаудиторной деятельности (процент самостоятельной и аудиторной работы); проанализирован уровень удовлетворенности студентов неязыковых специальностей качеством образования в контексте реализации образовательной программы и внедрения системы смешанного обучения.

Проведенное исследование показало, что внедрение смешанного обучения оказывает положительное влияние на процесс обучения студентов. В результате этого уровень удовлетворенности студентов стал выше.

Ключевые слова: технология смешанного обучения; балльно-рейтинговая система, самостоятельная работа, онлайн-поддержка.

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