DIGITAL DISTANCE LEARNING TOOLS IN ACADEMICS' ESP TRAINING

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Abstract. To create comfortable conditions for international students at Russian universities academics should have high fluency in English for specific purposes (ESP) and be able to use English as instruction language in the educational process. Moreover, digitalization of all the spheres of human life forces educators to use distance learning technologies. However, the members of the academic staff are not always able to use suitable digital tools when teaching in a foreign language.

The purpose of the research is to develop and implement a complex of digital distance learning tools for the faculty that study at ESP courses of the continuing professional development program "Lingva" realized at South Ural State University. The authors defined the concept of "digital distance learning tools"; evaluated the degree of awareness of the academics of the types and purposes of digital tools in distance foreign language learning. The effectiveness of the use of digital tools in distance foreign language learning was analyzed; the educators' attitudes to the types of digital distance learning tools were identified. A complex of digital distance learning tools based on the analysis of educators' needs was introduced into teaching English. Theoretical (analysis of modern scientific and methodological literature) and empirical (questionnaires, interviews, methods of mathematical processing of the data obtained) methods were applied.

The findings revealed that the major part of the surveyed academics were not aware of some digital tools and the possibilities of their application. Educators implemented some typical digital distance learning tools at their lessons, and would like to learn more about language learning platforms, sites for the development of speech activity types, and other features of LMS Moodle. Educators, in general, do not apply digital tools to the full extent for two main reasons: they do not have enough time to master necessary skills and they often encounter technical challenges. The findings may assist lecturers, language training practitioners in ESP training for academics via digital distance learning tools.

Keywords: digital distance learning tools, ESP course, professional language training, academics' training, university educational process, learning management system (LMS), language learning platforms

ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ ЦИФРОВЫХ СРЕДСТВ ПРИ ДИСТАНЦИОННОМ ОБУЧЕНИИ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЕЙ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНО-ОРИЕНТИРОВАННОМУ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

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Аннотация. В настоящее время возникла необходимость обучения научно-педагогических работников (НПР) профессионально-ориентированному иностранному языку с целью его применения в образовательном процессе в дальнейшем для создания условий комфортного обучения иностранных

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студентов. В условиях цифровизации всех сфер жизни общества преподаватели вынуждены использовать дистанционные формы обучения, но иногда они не способны использовать подходящие цифровые средства при обучении иностранному языку. Цель исследования – разработка и внедрение комплекса цифровых средств дистанционного обучения в образовательном процессе на примере занятий по профессионально-ориентированному иностранному языку для НПР дополнительной профессиональной программы повышения квалификации «Лингва» Южно-Уральского государственного университета. Поставлены и решены следующие задачи: проанализировано понятие «цифровые средства дистанционного обучения» применительно к дополнительному образованию; выявлена осведомленность НПР о видах и целях цифровых средств при дистанционном обучении в университете; проанализирована эффективность использования цифровых средств при дистанционном обучении иностранному языку; выявлено отношение НПР к использованию цифровых средств дистанционного обучения и их применению в качестве средства языковой подготовки; на основе анализа потребностей преподавателей внедрен в процесс обучения английскому языку комплекс цифровых средств дистанционного обучения. В ходе исследования применены теоретические (анализ современной научно-методической литературы) и эмпирические (анкетирование, интервью, методы математической обработки полученных данных) методы. Результаты исследования показали, что большая часть НПР ранее не знала о некоторых видах цифровых средств и возможностях их применения. Преподаватели хотели бы больше узнать о платформах для изучения языка, сайтах для обучения видам речи и других возможностях LMS Moodle. Преподаватели, как правило, не применяют цифровые средства в полной мере по двум основным причинам: у них нет достаточного времени для освоения необходимых навыков, и они часто сталкиваются с техническими трудностями. Полученные результаты могут помочь преподавателям, специалистам в области языковой подготовки в обучении НПР профессионально-ориентированному иностранному языку с помощью цифровых средств дистанционного обучения.

Ключевые слова: цифровые средства дистанционного обучения, курс ESP, профессиональная языковая подготовка, подготовка НПР, образовательный процесс университета, система управления обучением (LMS), платформы для изучения языков

Introduction

In the modern world more and more young people want to get education abroad and join international scientific community. As a result, the Russian education system needs to attract foreign students and improve conditions for their studying. This need is formulated in the national project "Education" (2019–2024) and the subproject "Export of education" (2017–2025) and the key goal is to improve the conditions for foreign citizens and raise the level of their education in Russia, as well as to increase the recognition of Russian education in the international educational market [18].

Foreign students' training can be successful mainly due to academics who are able to teach foreign students in English. Thus, there is a need to train and teach academics professional language in English, but we have to do that through distance learning due to active digitalization of higher education.

ESP (English for Specific Purposes), which is sometimes called CLIL for adults, combines language learning and study of any other discipline. ESP is comprised of Business English, English for engineers, financial experts, lawyers, doctors, pilots, etc., in other words ESP may be described as English for the diverse range of specialties and economy sectors. ESP training helps to meet special needs of students and employs appropriate methodology for a specialty, focuses on relevant for this specialty language in terms of grammar, vocabulary, register, discourse and genre. ESP can be learned by professionally employed specialists with sufficient professional experience, and university students who are still training to work in a particular field. Thus English may act as a tool for professional communication only or as a tool to introduce new topics, approaches, methods to students in their field, thus language learning goes along with the study of a special discipline [6].

Leading universities in Russia are changing their growth strategies to satisfy the demands and challenges of the fourth industrial revolution and to level up their competitiveness. The state pro-

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gram (Project 5-100) to support leading Russian universities was launched in 2013. South Ural State University (SUSU) as one of 21 participants involved into this project, and now "Priority 2030", considers transformation into a SMART university to be its main goal. Moreover, it also focuses on training a new generation of leaders able to cope with global challenges of sustainable development and make the world a better place.

Smart educational environment in the university implies flexible interactive educational environment (digitalization of education), free access to information, personal approach to teaching, project implementation and creation of an integrative scientific and creative space.

Educators are supposed to provide conditions for autonomous acquisition of necessary skills for a variety of learners in an interactive form, exchange content, get feedback, and develop educational products. To satisfy these needs, SUSU has launched its own production of up-to-date teaching aids and has introduced modern forms of distance learning – e-learning and b-learning, as well as mass distance courses in the MOOC format. Especially for academics there has been developed continuing professional development program "Lingva" to teach them basic English, ESP and EMI etc. and thus to avoid difficulties in teaching international students in the future.

Digital tools are presented by a number of digital platforms (Facebook, Edmodo, TED, Google docs), digital tutorials and e-books, presentation tools, online communities (blogs, Twitter), mobile applications, LMS (Moodle, Coursera, EdX), webinars and other digital media, the use of which is possible both from a desktop computer or laptop, and from smart devices (tablet, smartphone, smart TV). But the use of digital tools should not exclude the use of traditional methods of teaching, they are supposed to go along and provide alternative ways of interaction between educators and students.

When considering training a foreign language at the university we list among main advantages that the incorporating of digital tools will bring into the process that students like learning based on authentic modern resources and that it provides for communication in real contexts, including online communication. Besides, this is to be thought as a way to encourage students to use English for communication beyond the study-room and to learn a foreign language autonomously.

In spite of obvious advantages, not all participants of the educational process realize how important it is to integrate digital distance learning tools in teaching and learning a foreign language in higher school. Certain researchers explain it by the fact that there still exist such factors as negativism towards the education digitalization, lack of computer literacy, disagreement between the chosen technology and pedagogical goals and tasks, difficulties in solving users' problems, time and effort consuming development and implementation of courses [1].

The objective of the research is development and implementation of a complex of digital distance learning tools in the educational process on the example of the ESP classes for the academics of **continuing professional development program** "Lingva" of the South Ural State University. For this purpose we consider it to be necessary to start with defining the concept of "digital distance learning tools", understanding how academics and educators see using digital distance learning tools in the academic practice, then to identify the grounds to incorporate new technologies into teaching and studying a foreign language and, finally, to reveal the benefits both educators and learners can gain from the application of this technology.

The subject matter of the study is identified as the process of professional language training at the non-linguistic higher school environment. As for the scope of the study it is digital distance learning tools application as a means of academics' professional language training.

As with researching any specific field, the first step is to give a literature review.

Literature Review

Information technologies have been an integral part of modern life for decades. The fact could not but find its reflection in the field of education. For instance, electronic platforms allow educators to organize high-quality online teaching.

Scientists mainly research the question of integrating digital tools into the educational process in the context of different categories of learners, specifically, using computer-assisted technologies in elementary school [26], in secondary school [23], in the system of higher education [28]. Simultaneously, an increasing number of scientific publications are being devoted to outlining the positive effect of e-learning tools regardless of the age group or an educational level of learners. Researchers have proved that imple-

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mentation of digital technologies results in higher degree of students' involvement and motivation [5], expansion of the range of interaction patterns and, consequently, opportunities for students [3], enriching students' experience and applying knowledge in practical situations [16].

At the same time, in some publications the authors express concern about negative consequences of introducing digital tools, as well as problems that accompany or result from such experiments. All the negative effects fall under two categories, that is technological and non-technological. The former category includes such problems as poor access to necessary sources at places with a weak coverage of the high-speed Internet [24], high cost of equipment / service and other financial issues [7]. Among non-technological problems researchers specify the negative psychological effect [4], cheating during tests and distractions during class time, teachers' lack of technical and theoretical knowledge [11].

A number of scientists pay special attention at such issues as integrating digital tools in teaching a particular discipline, for example mathematics in secondary school [23], financial disciplines to students of higher educational institutions [14], in the system of teaching foreign languages [8] and others. Looking for and selecting effective smart tools suitable for the purposes of a certain discipline is a separate field of research.

We will focus on the process of academics' professional language training at the non-linguistic higher school, that is why we will primarily concentrate on how researchers interpret principles and approaches in terms of organizational aspects of teaching a foreign language in the university environment. Some authors who have chosen the same subject area devote their publications to how the role of a teacher is changed due to using digital distance learning tools in the educational process and how it increases students' autonomy in learning a foreign language [2]. Other authors reveal a number of didactic peculiarities of foreign language teaching for both academic and scientific purposes in smart-education [10], the employment of digital tools in the system of part-time education [27], the process of students' self-guided work organization with the use of digital tools to study a foreign language for professional purposes [21]. Despite the fact that studied publications cover different aspects of the field under investigation, there is a limited number of studies devoted to questions of integrating digital tools into the system of academics' ESP online training.

Before we start describing the research methodology and the introduction of digital distance learning tools incorporated into language teaching, it is necessary to define the concept "digital distance learning tools" as the key concept of this research. In fact, the term has no generally accepted definition. Nevertheless, we will use the definition from Oxford Dictionary, being a most established and acknowledged source. According to Oxford Dictionary, "digital" is defined as "involving or relating to the use of computer technology" (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/digital), and "technology" is defined as "the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry" (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/technology). Distance learning is considered to give learners an opportunity to be more engaged in the learning process [17].

Combining these two concepts, O. Kalugina and N. Tarasevich define smart technologies as "technologies which have educational utility, programmed so as to be capable of independent actions giving students and teachers an access to the world outside a classroom" [8].

This definition highlights an important feature of smart technologies: they provide for continuous access to any information from all over the world, which means that smart technologies are the key to getting worldwide content and thus going beyond the classroom in the digital format.

Smart technologies have one more important characteristic: they enable interactivity. This aspect is emphasized in E. Zhdanov's definition: "Smart technologies in education are technologies based on combining technical, pedagogical resources for teaching in an interactive educational environment with the help of specially developed content" [30]. The use of multimedia is not the only manifestation of interactivity, since it also expresses itself through interacting with the surrounding environment, the ability to instantly respond and adapt to changing conditions. This feature is closely connected with flexibility of smart technologies that enables educators to adopt them to learners' individual needs which, in its turn, facilitates personalization of education.

The conventional classification of speech activities into writing, reading, listening and speaking, prompts a logical classification of a variety of digital distance learning tools according to which skill they are designed to develop. There can be found different sites that aid in developing

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comprehensive skills for each of the mentioned speech activities [12].

Having reviewed the definitions presented above, we will operate with the following definition: digital distance learning tools are presented by both smart and online technologies that allow educators as well as students to come up with digital learning resources and combine their own and authentic content of the international community to learn a foreign language in an interactive educational environment.

Materials and Methods

In the course of the study, theoretical (analysis of modern scientific and methodological literature) and empirical (questionnaires, interviews, methods of mathematical processing of the data obtained) methods were applied.

We set several tasks in our research:

1) to identify what digital distance learning tools are, we made literature analysis and came to the conclusion that we should use digital distance learning tools that allow educators as well as students to come up with digital learning resources and combine their own and authentic content of the international community to learn a foreign language in an interactive educational environment;

2) to reveal the awareness of the academics about the types and purposes of digital tools in distance learning at the university, as well as in foreign language classes, a questionnaire, interview (among three "Lingva" groups of academics) were applied;

3) to analyze the frequency and effectiveness of the use of digital tools in distance learning a foreign language, a questionnaire, interview (among three "Lingva" groups of academics) were implemented;

4) to gain educators' interests and difficulties in relation to the types of digital distance learning tools and their use as a means of language training, needs analysis (among lecturers of English from South Ural State University) was used;

5) based on the analysis of the results and educators' needs, a complex of digital distance learning tools were introduced into the process of teaching English (the Edmodo language learning platform, sites for the development of speech activities and the new online course "ESP course: Economics and Management" through LMS Moodle).

The "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" (SPSS), a programs package for analysis, data presenting, that is used mostly in the social and behavioral sciences, was implemented in the study. Besides we used Cronbach's alpha as a measure of scale reliability.

Respondents. The participants who were asked to answer the questions of the questionnaire were mostly assistant professors, associate professors, full professors of the continuing professional development program "Lingva" at South Ural State University (national research university), Chelyabinsk, Russia. The experiment was carried out in September 2021. Academics from similar vocational training programs were also asked if they would participate in this study by completing the questionnaire and answering the questions of the interview.

Almost all academics who we approached agreed to participate, and a total of 55 completed questionnaires were obtained and interviews taken. Although the questionnaire and the interview did not represent responses from all the faculty members of the said university, they still show some interesting points revealing general understanding of digital distance learning tools in the academic environment.

There were involved 55 respondents all in all, 33 or 60% of them were female while 22 or 40% were male. Thus more female respondents were eager to participate in the experiment than male ones. According to the position at university the distribution of respondents is as follows: 26 or 47% are associate professors, 16 or 30% are assistant professors, 10 or 17% are postdocs and 3 or 6% are full professors. So the greatest number of participants of the survey belongs to associate and assistant professors, and then to postdocs.

As to the age of the participants, 28 (50%) of them belong to the age group of 30–39 years old, followed by 17 (30%) belonging to the age group of 20–29 years of age. Those aged between 40 and 49 compose 7 or 13% of respondents while 3 or 6% are above 50 years and nobody below 20 years of age participated in the survey. Such division of age groups stands for the fact that relatively young academics usually outnumber older ones at vocational training courses.

The authors interviewed 36 educators (lecturers of English) to find out if the educators of SUSU are ready to implement digital distance learning tools for professional language training, and what problems they face, when applying digital distance learning tools for teaching English at the university.

The respondents (academics who study ESP)

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stated their institute or school at the university, sex, and age. The survey is based on the results of interviews and answers to five questions about:

1) reasons to use digital distance learning tools;

2) types of digital distance learning tools that academics use most frequently at the university;

3) types of digital distance learning tools for a foreign language academics are aware of;

4) frequency with which academics use digital distance learning tools to learn a foreign language;

5) if digital distance learning tools assist academics in mastering professional language in English and in what way.

Educators-lecturers of English from South Ural State University were asked four more questions during the interview. Questions for those who teach English were about:

1) if communication with students via digital distance learning tools is different from the face-to-face communication;

2) if educators want to know more about digital distance learning tools and use them in an educational process;

3) types of digital distance learning tools that educators would like to know more about in English;

4) difficulties educators have to deal with when applying digital distance learning tools in English.

The Questionnaire and Interview Methods in the Research. Questionnaires are considered to be one of the most common diagnostic tools. Unlike tests, questionnaires do not contain correct and incorrect answers. They only reflect a person's attitude to some ideas, the extent to which they agree or disagree with certain statements. When preparing questionnaires, a researcher creates questions so that the answers will provide the information relevant for purposes of the research. Questionnaires can be used in different formats and cover different categories of respondents. The art of this method lies in the fact that questions should be properly worded and arranged, taking into consideration the requirements of a given survey. This method is quite popular. When anonymous, questionnaires let participants feel free and answer the questions sincerely and openly. Closed and open-ended questions provide information that can be easily converted into quantitative (e.g. count "yes" or "no") and qualitative (e.g. analysis of words used to express opinions) data [22]. The data derived from ques-

tionnaires summarise subjective opinions of respondents and may not be informative in the analysis of emotions or feelings. Questionnaires lack details, due to the limitations of space provided for written answers.

At the same time, interviews allow researchers to get more information about the subject matter. Besides, respondents usually give answers more spontaneously, emotionally and reveal their thinking in a more detailed way.

Our research questionnaire revealed how familiar academics are with different types of digital distance learning tools. The interview indicated academics' level of competence in employment digital distance learning tools in English.

Results and discussion

The research is designed to gain academics' idea of using digital distance learning tools for learning the professional language in English and educators' interests and difficulties in applying them as a means of language training. The analysis of answers is presented in terms of percentage, which shows most frequently used answers and typical ideas.

The questionnaire and interview below (among three "Lingva" groups of academics) were applied to see their understanding of the digital distance learning tools types, purposes and frequency of usage for learning ESP.

Reasons to use digital distance learning tools. We analysed the data according to the most frequently used answers:

• to encourage academics to learn complicated professional language in English– 32%;

• to learn a language with a certain degree of comfort – 15%;

• for academics to become active participants of the educational process – 21%;

• to deal with communication tasks on their own – 20%;

• to reveal academics' potential – 12%.

Types of digital distance learning tools that academics use most frequently at the university. One of the questions implied that the staff members will name the types of digital distance learning tools they use most often at the university. The results are shown below in Table 1. The first two positions in Table 1 show most frequently mentioned types in academics' worksheets. However, we should point out that academics are not acquainted with many types of digital distance learning tools, it means that they do not use them at their lessons of professional English.

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Table 1
**Frequency of using digital distance learning tools
at the university by the surveyed faculty members**

Types of digital distance learning tools	Frequency
Social networks (VKontakte)	46%
Computer programmes	28%
LMS Moodle	26%

Types of digital distance learning tools for a foreign language academics are aware of. We asked academics about the types of digital tools they know which they can use for learning a foreign language. The answers show that respondents are aware of only a limited number of available digital distance learning tools. Besides the types given in the previous question, our analysis in Fig. 1 shows that social networks, computer programmes and LMS Moodle are most frequently mentioned types in the answer sheets.

Frequency with which academics use digital distance learning tools to learn a foreign language. Academics were asked to estimate how often they use digital tools for learning a foreign language. 72% of respondents said that though they had already studied a foreign language at some other training program and they had an online course, they hardly ever did any tasks in LMS Moodle, because they were optional. The same respondents use different remote online sites quite often on their own beyond the lessons frame, and 28% less often. Fifty-five respondents mentioned that LMS Moodle is a great means of professional language training in English. They

wanted to learn a foreign professional language under educators' supervision through LMS Moodle without rejecting face-to-face communication.

We also asked follow-up questions in the interview after the questionnaire. The interview proved the answers gained in the questionnaire and showed the same results concerning:

If digital distance learning tools assist academics in mastering professional language in English and in what way. In response to this question all the respondents answered affirmatively. Among the major advantages of using digital distance learning tools in learning a foreign language they name an interactive context of educational environment; a huge choice of operation forms and modes; flexible approach to the choice of teaching methods; opportunities of training speed control, intensity and optimization of training load; information saturation; operational updating of training materials and feedback communication.

It is obvious from Table 2 that the Cronbach's Alpha value is acceptable, it reaches 0.625 for the five questionnaire questions. It shows that the questionnaire has an acceptable degree of stability and can be relied upon in the study field.

Table 2
Statistics of reliability for academics' survey

Cronbach's alpha	Questions number
0.625	5

Needs analysis (among lecturers of English from South Ural State University) was made
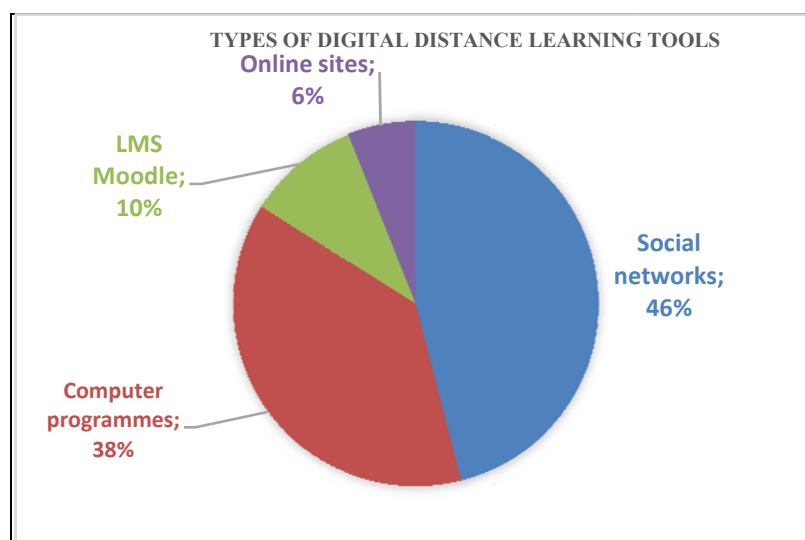

**Fig. 1. Types of digital distance learning tools
that academics indicated by frequency**

to gain educators' interests and difficulties in applying digital distance learning tools as a means of language training. Educators (lecturers of English) from South Ural State University answered in the interview the following four questions about:

If communication with students via digital distance learning tools is different from the face to face communication; If educators want to know more about digital distance learning tools and use them in an educational process. For the first and second questions positive answers comprised 100% in agreement. It indicates the necessity of implementing digital distance learning tools in academics' ESP training and the importance of learning more about such tools.

Types of digital distance learning tools that educators would like to know more about in English. Educators (lecturers of English) were asked what types of digital tools they would like to have more information about, especially about opportunities of using them in learning and teaching English. Our analysis in Fig. 2 shows that almost half of the respondents expressed their wish to have such information about all the types of digital distance learning tools. There have been detected differences in responses concerning questions about digital tools in native and foreign languages. The answer "Social networks" was not given. "Learning language platforms", "Online sites" and "LMS Moodle" are regarded by educators as the most significant in mastering digital distance learning tools for a lesson of English.

Difficulties educators have to deal with when applying digital distance learning tools in English. The most frequently used answers the analysis revealed are the following:

- educators consider themselves not quite confident in using digital distance learning tools – 36%;
- mastering LMS Moodle and all other types needs time resources – 24%;
- educators are not aware of application and creation of some types of digital tools – 24%;
- educators are ready to deal with all the difficulties, design online courses through LMS Moodle and employ digital distance learning tools at their lessons – 16%.

It is clear from Table 3 that the value of Cronbach's Alpha is very high, reaching 0.85 for the questions of the questionnaire. It indicates that the questionnaire has a high stability degree and can be relied upon in the study field of application.

Table 3
Statistics of reliability for educators' survey

Cronbach's alpha	Questions number
0.85	4

The gained data show that digital distance learning tools should be commonly applied as a means of training both in learning and teaching foreign languages. Application of a wide range of digital tools of different types helps to diversify the process of professional language training and encourage academics to master professional language in general.

Following the theoretical analysis, educators' needs, the questionnaire and the interview analysis, we consider applying in teaching English the below listed complex of digital distance learning tools: a language learning platform (Edmodo), sites for the development of speech
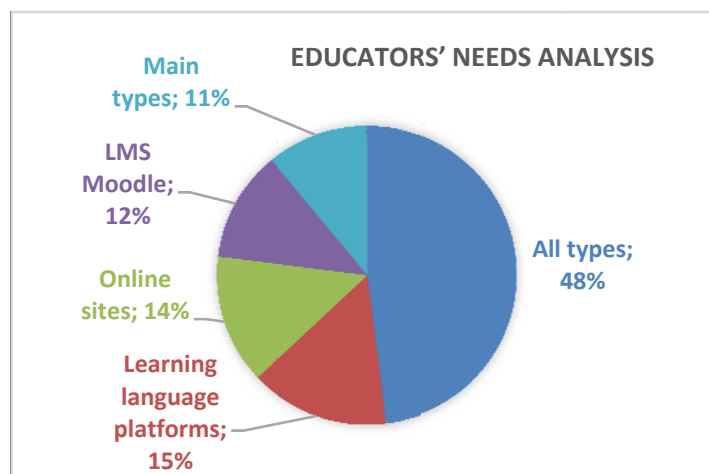

Fig. 2. Educators' needs analysis

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activity types (Blogger, Breakingnewsenglish, Vocaroo), and a new online course, "ESP course: Economics and Management" which develops the English language and was specially designed and implemented through the Moodle.

Online Professional Course "ESP Course: Economics and Management". We interviewed the educators (lecturers of English) what types of digital distance learning tools they would like to learn how to use in English, and they mentioned learning language platforms, online sites and LMS Moodle. That is the reason why there has been worked out a new online foreign professional language development course "ESP course: Economics and Management".

This online ESP course was designed for academics. The major aims of this course are to raise the effectiveness of foreign professional language learning by providing academics with a huge number of additional materials for studying and improving language skills and to boost the professional language mastering in English in the field of Economics and Management.

The ESP course has two parts: Economics and Management. The Part "Economics" contains 6 units and 4 interconnected modules in each unit. The standard modules are as follows: Vocabulary, Time to Read, Time to Write and More to Explore (additional material). The Part "Management" contains 7 units and the same 4 interconnected modules. All these modules pursue the purpose to integrate the process of developing all the skills in learning the professional language and also to encourage independent activity and better mastering of the professional language in English in the field of Economics and Management. At this stage we follow the individual and needs-oriented principle. The online foreign professional language development course has a simple structure and user-friendly interface even for those academics whose level of English is quite low and who are proficient in the use of modern technology.

The structure of each unit in the parts "Economics" and "Management" is the same through-out the course. Each unit starts with the Vocabulary module, which consists of interactive exercises for different kinds of professional vocabulary points (drag and drop, fill in the gaps, matching), games and quizzes. Bright and informative pictures accompany all vocabulary exercises and that helps students understand and do the tasks properly. At the beginning of the vocabulary module there is an information block called Language Summary. The Language Summary block is in fact the glossary listing the core words on the topics of the corresponding unit, which helps to expand the user's vocabulary of high-frequency professional words and phrases. Find the examples below in Table 4.

The block of exercises include interactive vocabulary exercises designed to develop word-formation skills and contextual deduction, to differentiate and identify lexical units, to think of lexical equivalents, etc. All types of exercises allow to revise and activate the lexical minimum of the unit, encourage academics to use professional vocabulary, use proper vocabulary in specific situations relevant to the purpose of the communication.

The Time to Read module helps to build up professional vocabulary and consolidate grammar. The texts are selected in accordance with the topics so that all the necessary vocabulary from the Language Summary block can be actively used. The reading module contains engaging and motivating texts, followed by challenging tasks which are aimed to help academics to read better. Among other things learners are required to guess the contextual meaning of words and phrases and identify true or false information in the tasks that follow the texts.

The Time to Write module provides academics with clear tips and detailed instructions on how to write business letters. Only after learners study the instructions and samples they move forward and perform a guided writing task on their own. In modern societies people mostly communicate via the Internet, social networks and a variety of mobile applications [9, 15, 29].

Table 4

Units and vocabulary topics

	Part	Unit	Vocabulary
Economics	Government and taxation	Types of taxes	Government and taxation
Economics	Efficiency and employment	Trends shaping the global economy	Efficiency and employment
Management	Managing across cultures	Managing diversity	Managing across cultures
Management	Recruitment	Head hunting	Recruitment

These writing tasks facilitate using professional vocabulary of the unit, while focusing on punctuation, spelling, connectors and practicing many other writing skills. Nowadays academics are expected to have a high level of competence in writing professional emails, their CVs, memos, proposals and other types of professional and personal documentation.

The More to Explore module contains additional tasks aimed to help academics enrich their knowledge in the field of Economics and Management, master high-frequency phrases in professional situations, e.g. recruitment process, managing across cultures or how to motivate staff, etc. Table 5 presents the modules' content in the online ESP course.

This new online foreign professional language development course "ESP course: Economics and Management" allows educators to have more time to practice speech at the online lessons as academics can get familiar with necessary background information at any time at their convenience and prepare questions in advance [13].

Edmodo: a Language Learning Platform. Bearing in mind that educators would like to learn how to use learning language platforms, we chose and implemented the language learning platform Edmodo. The platform creates free and secure educational environment and provides opportunities to model effective virtual collaboration and improve learning effectiveness.

Edmodo is rapidly gaining popularity in the world, which allows an educator to organize remote interaction with students. Since it is free and available for educators even in remote corners of the world, Edmodo is good for using as a platform for interaction both by individual educators or an educational institution as a whole. We can recommend applying Edmodo in order to arrange the educational process, facilitate professional development of an educator, organize interaction between administration, educators, parents.

Edmodo provides an educator for the following options: while organizing the educational process one can create classes and study groups, post tasks in many formats, upload all kinds of files and links, create a library, post messages on the wall seen by all the participants or send personal messages. Besides, the platform gives an educator a technical possibility to carry out surveys, create and post tests, quizzes, create a calendar of events, print a list of students and a schedule of assignments from Edmodo, embed links, videos, images, audio in posts on the wall and in assignments. Educators can also track the results of students' performance in tests, assignments, use electronic journals. Furthermore, Edmodo facilitates to arrange both daily educational routine and project and research activities, thus providing for a chance to stimulate all types of educational activities [19, 20, 25].

One of educational options provided by the platform has been realized in the process of academics' professional language training in the project "Managing across cultures". In the framework of this project academics were encouraged to join the professional community, watch the relevant videos and do a number of online tasks. The results of their work were discussed online when academics made their presentations about managing across cultures. Table 6 presents

Table 5

Modules' content in the online ESP course

Module	Content	Types of exercises
Vocabulary	Interactive exercises	1. Match words with the translation 2. Match words with definitions 3. Match words with pictures 4. Fill in the gaps with a proper word 5. Drag and drop the word into the text
Time to Read	Interactive exercises, attached texts	1. Answer the questions 2. Match titles to the paragraphs 3. Fill in the gaps with the missing sentences 4. Mark the sentences TRUE or FALSE
Time to Write	Tasks which allow to attach a file	1. Write a professional email, CV, memo, proposal and other types
More to Explore	Interactive exercises, attached mp3 files and URL links	1. Drag and drop the words into the text or sentence 2. Fill in the gaps with a suitable word 3. Answer the questions 2. Mark the sentences TRUE or FALSE

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an example of the project "Managing across cultures" and online tasks.

While participating in the project, academics did not passively watch the videos, but were to take an active part in discussions and contribute their comments, reviews. This learning environment motivated academics to develop their professional language skills, which resulted in very positive learning outcomes.

Online Sites Designed to Develop Certain Types of Speech Activity (Blogger, Breakingnewsenglish, Vocaroo). As we previously mentioned, when concerned teaching and learning foreign languages, all the variety of digital distance learning tools are conveniently classified into teaching writing tools, teaching reading tools and tools for listening and speaking, which are represented by different online sites and develop comprehensive speech activities [12].

Foreign Language Teaching Writing Tool (Blogger). One can write about any topic on blogger.com, such as the striking news or break through ideas. In Table 7 our example is given in the sphere of Economics and Management that we held using Blogger.

Foreign language teaching reading tool (Breakingnewsenglish). Breakingnewsenglish is an electronic educational online resource for learning English, for students, teachers, suitable for self-study. This site is highly recommended for users who strive to develop their language skills, including the skill to use spoken language. The site provides for mini-lessons, online exercises to improve reading speed, speaking. Lessons are grouped according to topics, like Environment, Business English, Health, Styles, People, Technology, World News, etc. with resource materials, which can be printed out. We find it very handy that lessons and news are given to the student at 7 levels of language proficiency, while reading and listening materials are given at 5 different speeds to be chosen according to the level of the student. This site also gives an opportunity to take special language courses, including email courses. The site has pages in the social networks "Twitter", "Facebook".

In the above named project participating academics read such texts as "UK economy shrinks by 25 per cent", "A 4-day work week in Japan increased productivity", etc. and did the suggested tasks on the site. As part of their feedback participants emphasized importance of online exercises to improve the speed of reading.

Foreign language teaching listening and speaking tool (Vocaroo). Vocaroo (http://vocaroo. com/) is an online voice recorder that allows users to create voice recordings. It is free and does not require login or any software downloads. Using this voice recorder allows to record, send, download voice messages or share voice messages to YouTube, Facebook, etc. Teachers can also use Vocaroo to embed their own voice messages into the course website, or have students use the app to create notes for assignments, projects or tests.

In Table 8 below you may encounter this digital distance learning tool for listening and speaking, Vocaroo, with tasks and corresponding topics.

All the listed digital distance learning tools designed to improve writing, reading, listening and speaking skills contributed to how academics gained professional language and such special skills as rules of writing business letters. It created the situation of success and motivated the academics to study harder.

Table 6

The example of the project "Managing across cultures" and online tasks

Project	Online task
Managing across cultures	1. Make up the vocabulary list to the related topic and share in Edmodo 2. Make up a summary 3. Make a presentation about managing across cultures (places, cities, countries, differences, etc.) 4. Pick the most disputable ideas and comment on them in Edmodo

Table 7

Blogger in Economics and Management

Unit	Writing task
Economics	1. Write an essay of 150–200 words "Trends shaping the global economy"
Management	1. Imagine you work for a recruitment agency or a headhunting firm. Write an email of 50–100 words to your boss recommending your choice of candidates for the positions chosen and outlining the reasons

Vocaroo in Economics and Management

Units with the topics	Listening and Speaking task
Economics (International Trade, Economics and Ecology), Management (Work and Motivation, Women in Business, Leadership)	1. Listen to each other's voice recordings 2. Comment upon voice recordings 3. Come to some conclusions and make a speech

Conclusion

The research proved that the majority of academics understand how important it is to use digital distance learning tools as a means of academics' professional language training in English, noting the effectiveness of these tools, but it also revealed that they are not familiar with some types of digital tools and how they can be applied to perfect the learning process. Educators implement some typical digital distance learning tools types at their lessons, without knowing how to use some other types, which can be more appropriate in some cases. The research results also demonstrate that while educators are aware of digital distance learning tools in general, they usually do not apply many of them to the full extent for the two reasons: they do not have enough time to master necessary skills and they often encounter technical challenges preventing the usage of the tools.

Educators expressed their interest in knowing more about digital distance learning tools and based on the analysis of the results and educators' needs, a complex of digital distance learning tools have been introduced into the process of teaching English, such as the Edmodo language learning platform, sites for the development of speech activities and the new online course "ESP course: Economics and Management" through LMS Moodle.

In general, educators and academics in the role of students are optimistic about mastering and incorporating digital distance learning tools into the process of professional language training. In professional foreign languages teaching nowadays the approach of using up-to-date digital distance learning tools technologies should be applied. Universities should assist educators to apply a wider range of digital tools so that academics as students could succeed in their mastering professional language. Besides, it will prepare academics to further integration of their professional language skills into a university educational process. Due to using digital distance learning tools, academics will select better resources and tools to satisfy all the needs they may have, and also to make professional language training easier and learning environment more exciting.

When chosen appropriately, digital distance learning tools can eliminate the blocking factors and lead up the effective use of new technologies. Diverse use of digital distance learning tools in the classroom online activities and academics' individual work will not only facilitate acquiring foreign professional language skills, but also encourage educators' motivation to teach.

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