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FACULTY OF WORLD ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
SCHOOL OF ASIAN STUDIES

**METHODS OF TEACHING
ORIENTAL LANGUAGES
ACTUAL PROBLEMS AND TRENDS**

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Higher School of Economics
National Research University
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School of Asian Studies

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This edition includes the II-nd International conference: “Methods of Teaching Oriental Languages Actual Problems and Trends” collection of papers. The materials are devoted to the problems and methods of teaching Oriental languages, translation and intercultural communication. The collection of papers is intended for researchers and anyone interested in Oriental studies.

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**LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS
AS METHODOLOGICAL INSTRUMENT
FOR ADDED EFFECTIVENESS
OF TEACHING ARABIC
IN HIGHER SCHOOL:
THE CASE OF BASIC COURSE
OF ARABIC LANGUAGE**

The role of the Internet and its information resources in the field of education and in practice of foreign languages teaching cannot be overstated. With the advent of the Internet, with its vast information resources and revolutionary technologies, a real opportunity to change the concept of language education has appeared. It is obvious that to ignore such a powerful resource in education and, in particular, in teaching foreign languages according to the new educational standards, is impossible.

Learning Management Systems (LMS) represent educational technologies of the new generation, which open innovative opportunities and principally new approaches to optimization of the teaching/learning process. Having been implemented in HSE since 2009, LMS is becoming more and more popular with the passing of each year as an integral part of educational process. This is also true in teaching

of foreign languages and eastern languages in particular.

In this paper we present some results of LMS use in the process of teaching of foreign languages for the non-speakers starting from 0-Level on the example of "Basic Course of Arabic Language (BCAL)", First Year of Undergraduate Program (modules 1-4). The Course is being taught in the frame of educational program for the specialization of "Eastern and African Studies" (undergraduate), as implemented at the School of Asian Studies of HSE, from the start of 2010, i.e. during the period of the last 4 years.

We hereby analyze, on the basis of statistics data, the difference in the rates and results of teaching/learning of the BCAL study course during 2 years' period with and without use of LMS.

The results of several project activities of students during the course study in different areas of development of language skills such as: reading texts in Modern Standard Arabic, oral and written translation, listening and comprehension of original speech, retelling as well as creative activities (essays and summaries in Arabic) have been displayed in our Presentation to the participants of the Arabic Panel of the II International Conference "Methods of Teaching Oriental Languages: Actual Problems and Trends" (Moscow, May, 2014). The Presentation also included methods of optimization of students' self-studies outside of class hours such as uploading tests reports to the course electronic page for evaluation, etc.

During the opinions exchange held upon the Presentation "pluses" and "minuses" of using LMS and also "obsta-

cles" in the way of using the system in the teaching/learning process were discussed. Judging from our 2-years' experience we argue that the most evident "pluses" of LMS being actively exploited during BCAL are:

1) development of high levels of self-discipline in students:

- establishing strict time limits of the results to be uploaded: technically the student cannot upload his/her report later than indicated in the "Task/Project time limit", thus the "must-do-in-time" principle is observed; the principle of consistent and timely execution of tasks is very important in the study of the basic language courses as a condition for successful learning of new material is the assimilation of already studied grammar rules and vocabulary. Therefore, the "deadlines" system in the methodical organization of the learning process is crucial;

- high level of self-control while audio-recording of text reading during homework: psychologically it is more difficult for a student to upload a not completely prepared recorded file for evaluation (as the file will be kept in the system), than reading a not completely prepared text in classroom ("fire-and-forget" phenomenon);

- opportunity to fully participate in the learning process remotely in case of missed class sessions (full access to course material through electronic page); absence in the classroom can no longer be grounds for ignoring the missed material and/or nonfulfillment of the assignments in time;

2) increase in effectiveness of "instructor - student" interactive communication:

- possibility for instructor to comment on accomplished tasks and to monitor individual work on revision of mistakes;
- possibility to upload samples of translation, keys to tasks, etc., which makes it possible for students to self-control work results;
- the ability to set meetings increases communication between instructors and students;

3) the use of new forms of learning and enhancing students motivation:

- possibility of remote group work; at the advanced stage of study (module 4) creative activities for group work are offered, for example, a contest for the best translation of fiction texts from Arabic into Russian: anonymous files with the each student's written translation of the same text are uploaded and as a result of online voting (in which all the students are participating) the best three variants of translation are selected, estimated at 10, 9 and 8 (out of 10) points respectively. This kind of activities usually causes great interest, the contest results are discussed in the classroom;

4) increase in effective coordination of learning levels and evaluation status in case of several instructors teaching the same course in different groups:

- joint course account for all instructors and one combined assessment log for all students;

- possibility for any instructor to upload tasks and study material for all students;

- free access for all instructors to results of all the students' activities; in cases when the educational process in the same discipline is managed in several study groups with different trainers uniform standards for methods of control of knowledge and competencies as well as systems and applied assessment criteria are of great importance. Opportunities provided by LMS in the unification of control and measuring materials and parameters of assessment of learning outcomes can hardly be overestimated;

- unlimited period of storage of all students' accomplishments during the course period for further reevaluation of the course dynamics as well as each student's achievements in the time-line analysis;

- quantitative monitoring of success levels of individual student and group of students, which leads to the possibility of adjusting tactical approach to the course instructing with adapting current tasks when necessary "on-the-fly";

5) personalization of learning process:

- instructor's comments as well as evaluation results are accessible strictly on the personal basis (in accordance with the principle of personal data protection). In accordance with the requirements of confidentiality of personal data evaluation of each student must be available only to the stu-

dent. This requirement can be fully achieved by the features of personalized access provided in LMS;

- not the least is the role LMS plays in providing opportunity to present the results of their project execution directly to the teacher, particularly for those students who may be shy and avoid speaking up in class.

Among the features of the system there are also using e-mail and blogs, instant messaging, video chats and other effective means of communication between teacher and students as well as among students themselves.

One of the important benefits of conducting electronic journal of estimates in LMS is the ability of differentiated assessment of tasks of different complexity. As an illustrative example, the listening of text in Arabic with its subsequent recording and performing grammar tasks (alignment marks), as well as written translation of the text into Russian, can be considered. Because listening (OCR by ear) is one of the most difficult aspects of language acquisition, performing this type of work in the classroom with a limited number of auditions is preceded by audition of similar texts at home, but a required number of times. During the self-study student has the opportunity to listen to each text as many times as he feels necessary for the successful implementation of the project. Thus the task of effective audio reception of native speaker's narration is being achieved. Although home listening is an important aspect, the implementation of each home project has a

lower "weight" from the point of view of estimation, than fulfillment of the similar project in the classroom, which is ranked higher, because the number of possible auditions is limited and, in addition, there is no possibility to use a dictionary to clarify the meanings of lexical units. However, the project carried out in the classroom gets one score; at the same time, each similar project, completed at home, is evaluated separately, and then the overall score for home listening is put. The same kind of flexible system of assessment is applied in respect of projects such as translation, essay, presentation, etc.

The statistics data give a visual representation of a high degree of optimization of educational process due to the transfer to the LMS of most time-consuming aspects on the example of just two aspects of educational activity: in one study group during the academic year (modules 1-4) in the aspect of control of texts-reading skills 13 hours 20 minutes (25 texts x 4 x minutes x 8 students) of classroom time was saved; in the aspect of control text-retelling skills - 18 hours and 20 minutes (25 texts x 5 minutes x 8 students). These additional hours allowed more exercises aimed at practicing the most difficult learning skills - listening comprehension of original texts with subsequent retelling.

Accumulated empirical data leads us to the following conclusion: while the volume of additional work (outside classroom) on behalf of student and, especially, instructor increases significantly, especially on the preparatory stage

where the methodology is being laid down for remote forms of instruction and evaluation scale for different types of work is being developed, there is a clear bonus of volumes of time which is freed for the kinds of activities most effectively realized in the classroom; more time can be dedicated to the instruction in grammar of Modern Standard Arabic. Comparative analysis of the results of study of the main aspects of the BCAL program in the terms of using of LMS and without the use of the LMS shows that the transfer of time-consuming kinds of work into the form of remote reporting allowed to save significant amounts of time in the classroom for those types of work under the guidance of a teacher that are impossible or difficult to implement remotely as well as for practicing of communication skills in groups.

The combination of full-time and distance forms of education requires careful and tedious preparatory work during the stage of methodological design and planning of the study course's program. It is necessary to clearly define the tasks that are advisable to migrate to distant forms of work, and thus to free up time in classroom for those types of work for which face-to-face communication between students and teacher and among students is needed.

We may conclude that the merit of LMS as of now has yet to be fully comprehended for the methodology enhancement of instruction in the BCAL in higher school. In general the students' feedback is positive: students like the system and appreciate its possibilities, though at the first stage of

using the system they find it a challenge to get used to it. For the teaching staff using LMS certainly means spending much time on creating tasks, creating log estimates, accommodation reference material, assignments and projects, maintaining chats and forums, but then all the efforts are yielding tangible results.

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TEACHING THE ARABIC LANGUAGE: PROBLEMS IN LANGUAGE OR THE SPEAKERS?

First I would like to thank the High School of Economics in the Federal Republic of Russia and the Arab community for their precious invitation taking on a human dimension, and cultural openness that mitigate the conflict and the fighting during the savage globalization time.

When I sat for an entrance exam at the "Ecole Normal" 45 years ago, the examiner asked me, "Which of your teachers do you love most?" I answered immediately: "The teacher of the Mathematics and the teacher of Arabic." However, the Arabic language period is no more interesting or favored these days. Very often, students nowadays waste their time in this period. Has the teacher changed? Has the language itself changed or have people themselves changed?

This distaste for the Arabic language is almost reflected in the acquisition of the skills and competencies of the Arabic language, so teaching Arabic has become an almost unsolvable problem on short terms. This does not merely threaten good communication, but also national existence in the world of globalization.

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