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The Effectiveness of Learning German on Moodle

Extended summary

The introduction of modern technologies, most of all the Internet, has propelled the changes of the education system in our country and in the global scene alike. In the past few decades, foreign language teaching has witnessed an introduction of new learning methods which include the use of computers. Distance learning is one of these methods. The topic of this research paper is a study of the effectiveness of this innovation in the German as a Foreign Language curriculum at the Tourism and Hotel Management Faculty and Business Faculty of the Singidunum University in Belgrade. Searching for answers to the questions whether and to what extent distance language learning produces better effects compared to traditional instruction, a testing was conducted involving distance learning students (experimental group) and students of traditional courses (control group) who regularly visited the Moodle platform at the aforementioned faculties, i.e., attended traditional lectures within German 1 and German 2 courses. The objective of the testing was to establish whether the two groups of students demonstrated any statistically significant difference in the language achievement at the beginner's level (A1). The comparison of the two groups was conducted based on the number of points scored at the skills sub-tests (listening, reading, writing and speaking), as well as on the total number of points scored at the test, the final grade and the number of years of learning German. The conclusion is that a statistically significant difference between these two groups was identified only at the listening test, where the students from the traditional study group achieved better results. All the other subtests revealed the same statistical results of the experi-

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mental and control groups. When viewed as a whole, the students' achievement in both forms of teaching does not differ significantly. This encouraging fact is important for faculties which are planning to introduce foreign languages in their distance learning programs. On the basis of the critical analysis of the model used for distance language learning, the most important directions for the improvement of the existing practice were defined: organizing virtual meetings of teachers and students at least once a week by means of audio or video conferencing to diminish the sense of isolation; encouraging students to work together on the platform through a variety of activities, using tools such as wiki, blog, forum, chat room; using a textbook by a well-known publisher which, as additional material, offers online activities on a free of charge or a commercial platform that the faculty can install on its server; improving and enhancing students' technical skills; relieving teachers of some of their weekly classes at traditional courses in order to give them more time for a better preparation of online learning materials and activities, synchronous and asynchronous CMC with distance students, monitoring of students' work on the platform, and further training in the field of distance education (when it comes to this, more support from institutions, primarily the faculty and the Serbian Ministry of Education, is more than welcome). Further studies will help us answer the question whether the university distance teaching of other foreign languages in Serbia can help students to achieve linguistic competence at the level prescribed by the curriculum.

Keywords: German language, distance language learning, Moodle, skills, assessment.

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