A STEP TOWARDS DISTANCE LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

Moroz Olena
Ph.D., Associate Professor
Kherson State Maritime Academy

One of the most important characteristics of the modern era is the transition towards the information society which determines the need of information and communication technologies introduction into all spheres of life. The tendency of the last decade is the continuous improvement of technical systems and devices used at workplaces. As a result it is explicitly required that an employee is ready to work with digital technologies. It is especially true about the work of future seafarers as they will need to operate ships equipped with modern navigational systems, electronic charts, satellite navigation and communication systems, integrated bridge systems as the like. Such rapid technological advancement and intense growth of information lumps in all social spheres result the aggravation of clashes between the amount of the information produced by society and the possibility of its uptake with the help of traditional educational technologies. The need to uptake more and more amount of information demands for the search and use of new learning and teaching technologies and approaches. So, the global aim of today's education is the development of key competencies which will enable the graduates to effectively perform their professional duties, to easily adjust to new trends and changes in their sphere, to readily develop and grow both as professionals and personalities.

In compliance with the requirements stipulated by the European Council [1] to implement the competency-based approach we, as teachers, need to remember about the need to develop along with the professional competencies also some basic competencies such as the ability to speak a foreign language, the ability to work in a team, the ability to learn. These basic competencies will enable them to form and effectively use the mechanism of deliberate information search, analysis, transformation and usage for the achievement of specific practical purposes, to act independently and improve their knowledge, to master new skills and new technologies remaining flexible, up-to-date and competitive specialists. Due to the active IT introduction, it is almost impossible to imagine the work of both teachers and students without the use of computer-based technologies that appear to be a powerful means of active learning and research processes. Scientists emphasize the essential role of ICTs, multimedia tools, computer databases at all stages of the teaching / learning process. They consider the use computer-based tools and devices to be a crucial condition of making future professional ready to function fully in the digital world. Today both higher education and the contemporary workforce call for digital savants who can seamlessly work with different media and new technologies as they emerge [2].

The on-line education as a pedagogical technology can provide for the above mentioned aim achievement. At the same time, in sight of the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world, it has been acknowledged that the distance

learning mediated via computer based technologies can become a really useful tool to ensure the access to the learning materials and procedures to the learners. For the students of high maritime institutions such type of education is even of bigger importance as because of peculiar features of their shipboard practice they do not always have the possibility to visit the lesson off-line.

Considering the above mentioned, it is believed that the development of on-line courses should be implemented into the practice of teaching-learning process to make provisions for up-to-date, efficient and sound professional training. The **aim** of the paper is to describe the attempt of the on-line course Business Maritime English introduction for the maritime students of Master's degree via learning management system Moodle complimented by the possibilities of cloud platform Zoom.

LMS Moodle is free of charge open system for distance learning management. It provides for the wide range of tools for the teaching-learning interaction in high education establishment. A teacher can organize her/his own course in compliance with the learning needs. When developing the course in Business Maritime English it was decided to use the following logic of structuring: presenting new information to students, providing them with the possibility of practicing the material in focus, testing language the outcomes of the Module and then ensuring the students have the ability to speak on the topic studied.

Moodle toolset allows presenting the material in different formats: word documents, presentations, training videos, etc. The most preferable types of files for material presentation in the course of Maritime English are word or pdf documents with the extracts / chapters / annexes of official International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted documents such as SOLAS, STCW Code, IAMSAR Manual and the like which provide internationally adopted rules and regulations concerning the topic studied. Another useful source of information presentation is posting training videos connected to the topic and explaining main procedures of passage planning, inspection conduct, Man Overboard or other distress units rescue. This part of the course has proved to be quite effective as it allows for the self-paced learning [3], when students can process the information as many times as they actually need and when it is convenient for them with the possibility to review separate pieces or the whole files whatever is necessary which encourages students' initiative to learn. Picture 1 shows the way the tasks are structured across the Module "Search and Rescue at Sea".
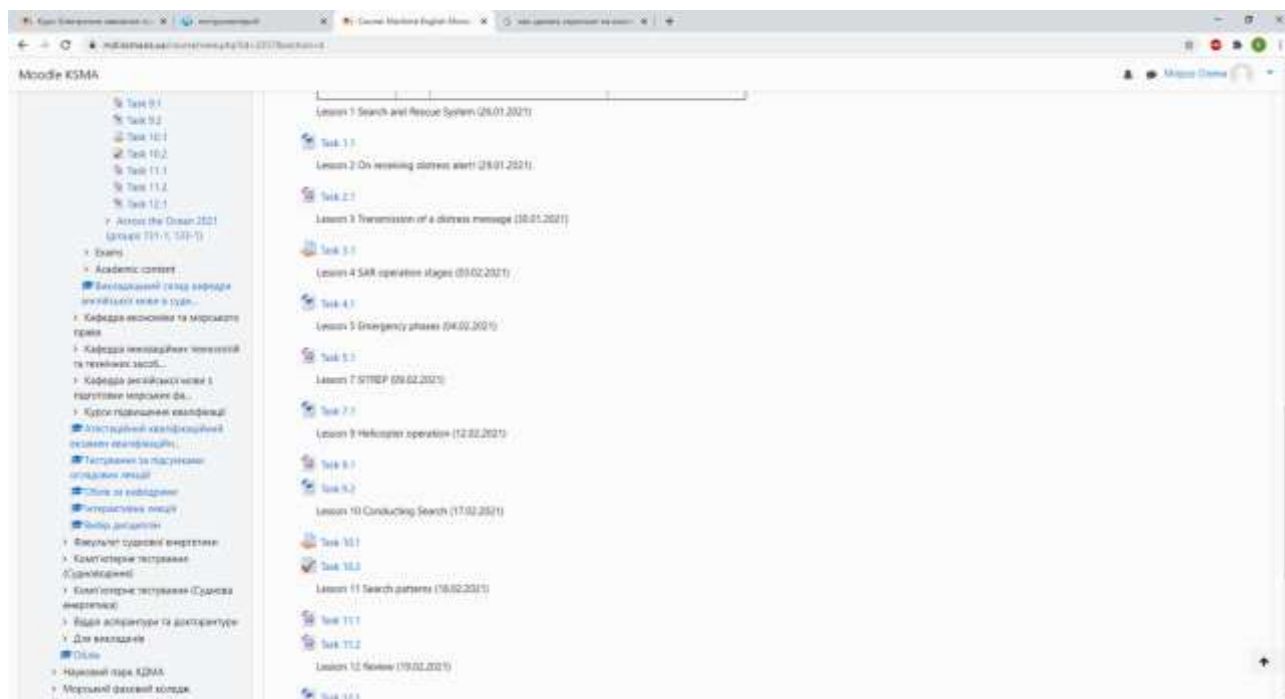
Picture 1 The structured design of the course Module

After the information has been presented to students they need to practice the key language elements – grammar and/or vocabulary – essential for the topic which are then used as "the building blocks" of language [4, 77] while producing meaningful utterances. Such training tasks and activities can be introduced in two main formats. Assignments are the downloaded tasks which require completion by students and uploading the tasks done back on Moodle for a teacher to assess and leave some feedback or correction if necessary. Depending on how successful the performance is a teacher can either leave some feedback for a student to mind those details later on or provide for another assignment if a student has obviously failed the first one. This enables the personalized approach towards the teaching-learning process as those students who complete the tasks successfully do not need to waste their time waiting for others to succeed or repeat similar tasks again. So, only those who have some difficulties in performing the tasks and not showing positive outcomes of the lessons passed will need to review the material again and practice dealing with other activities until they finally pass them successfully. Teacher's comments and feedback, grade and the amount of repeated tasks is visible only to the teacher and the student they are intended for, so it averts the problem of criticism or mockery thus making weaker students more confident and feeling at ease. Picture 2 illustrates the way the page with the assessed assignment looks like and how teacher – student interaction is achieved while having on-line courses. Together with Assignments Moodle suggests a wide variety of quizzes (True/False, multiple choice, gap filling, labeling and other types). Quizzes are also designed and assigned to students individually; they can be arranged in multiple tries mode to provide for the practicing opportunities.
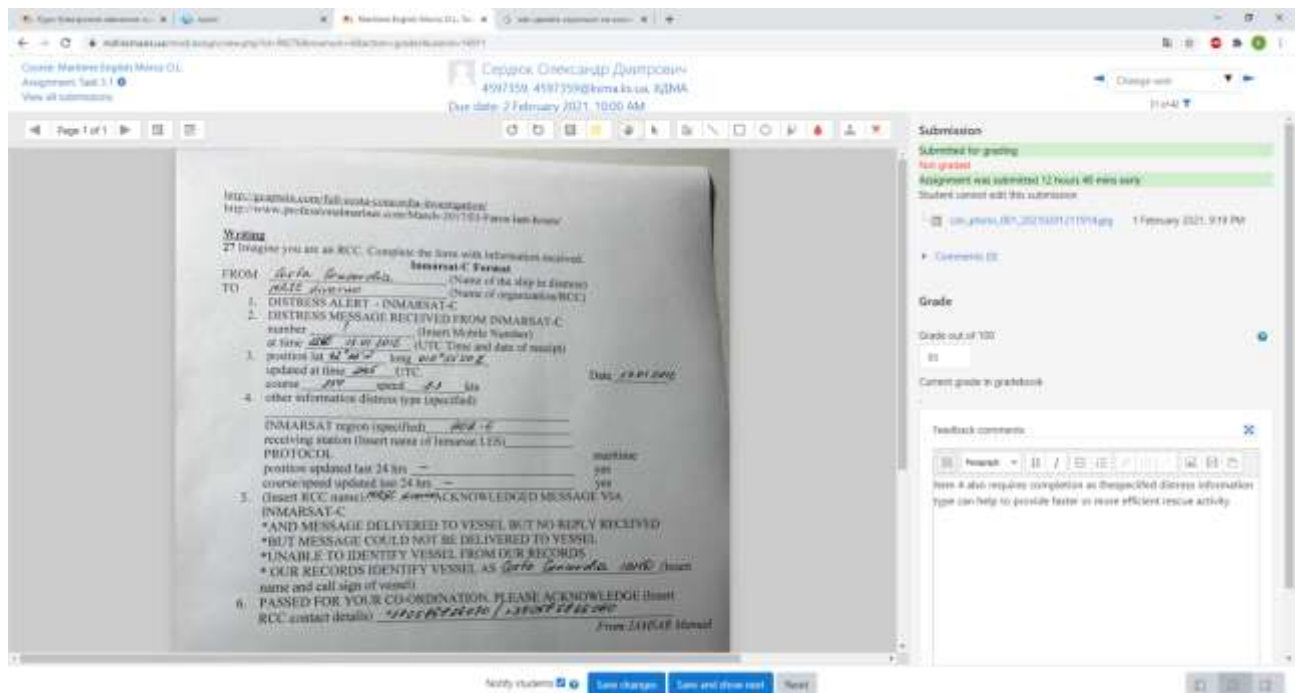
Picture 2 Assessing students' assignments on-line

Though, it is need to be kept in mind that one of the key professional competencies of future seafarers is the communicative one [5], which means that they need to be able to use and understand English which is recognized by IMO as a working language. That is why the main priority when teaching Maritime English is the development of basic communication skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) by means of providing the range and diversity of communicative activities where students will be actively engaged into communication in English. For that purpose the element of face-to-face collaboration and cooperation is extremely important as it enables the communication skills and strategies development. So, the course described is complemented with the on-line sessions in the format of video conferences conducted on Zoom platform which allows for the teacher – student(s), student – student(s) communication arranged in the form of pair or group work. Having already mastered the necessary vocabulary and grammar, having gained the necessary amount of professional information and facts individually via Moodle tasks at this stage of the course structure the students are ready to use the knowledge for performing collaborative tasks based on active interpersonal communication aimed at producing appropriate solutions for the given professional problems, situations or tasks.

So, the use of the on-line course for the purposes of distance learning implementation has proved to be a quite effective and useful tool of achieving learning needs and providing the students with the opportunity to continue the education even if they don't have a chance to visit the lessons at the Academy for a variety of reasons. The future research may be focused on determining the differences and specific peculiar features of on-line courses for students of different levels of education (1-2 year students, 3-4 year students, master degree course etc.).

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