

## The advantage of using ICT to support direct teaching and self-study

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the possibilities of using ICT for self-study of foreign languages and as a support of direct teaching.*

*Following the development projects of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, teaching English at the Faculty of Business and Management has been connected with an electronic support in the form of blended learning within the university e-learning system. Teaching is supplemented by various types of activities employing interactive revision exercises and electronically submitted assignments. The paper summarizes the main advantages of the use of ICT elements in teaching Business English courses.*

*With respect to the results achieved, The Institute of Foreign Languages sent an application for a project called BUT English Campus which was approved and its implementation is planned for the years 2009–2012. It is supported by the European Social Fund within the Education for Competitiveness program and the state budget of the Czech Republic. Its aim is to create a large support for the study of English for students and employees.*

*An e-learning support for the self-study of English enabling further development of the acquired language skills will be created within the BUTEC project. It will supply the possibility of self-evaluation and preparation for international City&Guilds examinations. The e-learning module will offer a tool for English language development and improvement. It will supplement English classes and serve employees for further language training and self-evaluation. The e-learning module will be incorporated in the BUT information system and include a testing part, grammar and vocabulary, all supported by numerous audio and video recordings. The module will contain a wide range of sample documents and downloadable materials. It will also offer suggestions for self-study and links to other resources.*

*The paper summarizes the experience with incorporating e-learning support into teaching and describes the objectives and plans of the running project aimed at creating compact e-learning environment for self-study and as a supplement of direct teaching.*

### 1. Introduction

Teaching English should reflect the demands for ongoing education and attempt to use all available means to reach the best results. It has become a common practice at the Brno University of Technology to use e-learning as part of the educational process. E-learning is an integral part of the information system therefore it has the advantage of being interconnected with the database of students which enables students to access it automatically after signing in for a concrete course in the study plan. Or, there also exists a possibility that an e-learning course can be made accessible for all students and employees of the Brno University of Technology, which will be the case of the BUTEC project (more information on it will be introduced further on).

E-learning at the Brno University of Technology also employs Moodle which is user friendly and offers the possibility of creating interactive materials which can be processed directly in Moodle or materials produced outside Moodle – e.g. Hot Potatoes. Hot Potatoes provide teachers with the opportunity to prepare various types of exercises which are subsequently downloaded into Moodle. Moodle encompasses a wide range of activities: it enables teachers to put complementary or additional materials such as presentations or study texts or materials to be downloaded by students or various links which can serve the students for further practice and self-study.

Another positive feature of Moodle is that it allows submitting of assignments. Students submit assignments straight into the individual course in Moodle and the teacher of the course can assess them in Moodle. So there is an immediate feedback for the students of the course. The feedback is important not only for full-time students but especially for students in the combined form of studies who are not so much in direct contact with the teacher as opposed to full-time students. Moodle even enables the teacher to monitor students' activity in e-learning. To be exact, the teacher not only can reveal what assignments students worked on but they can as well trace how much time students spent on individual activities, how many attempts they used to complete an assignment, when exactly they accessed the course online. This information proves useful for the teacher in the sense of disclosing problematic items on which students spent a large amount of time. The teacher can subsequently analyze the problems in detail.

## 2. Current use of e-learning support at the Brno University of Technology

Moodle as an e-learning tool is widely used both at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and the Faculty of Business Management where foreign languages are taught by the Institute of Foreign Languages. It is aimed as a supplement of direct teaching and is linked with language classes. The following paragraphs summarize the way e-learning support, i.e. blended learning is used in teaching Business English courses. First, e-learning support serves as a supplement to a concrete course. The



Fig. 1: Topic 3 from e-learning course Professional English

following lines introduce an example of a course which will illustrate the advantages of e-learning. The course is called Professional English. The topics in the e-learning support follow the topics of the course book, therefore orientation in the e-learning is very easy for the students.



Fig. 1 shows one of the topics studied in the course and consists of several parts. First, there are Presentations. In this section students find Presentation requirements – the criteria assigned for their presentation, i.e. the topic and suggestions for the presentation which should help them when preparing. Students have to submit their presentations straight into the e-learning using the link of their teacher (e.g. Presentations – Jana’s groups). As can be observed from Fig. 2, the teacher can see which students already submitted their assignments and can grade them. Thus the students get feedback on their work. There exists the possibility to offer only the grade in the form of percentage or the teacher can decide to write a comment on students’ assignment. Although a comment of this kind is for the teacher more time consuming than a mere grade, it is of invaluable benefit to the student because the teacher can reveal the features the student should concentrate on.

Second, a useful section which leads students to self-study is Key to exercises where students find answers to course book exercises (mostly grammar and vocabulary). The aim is to get students used to work on their own, to complete a task and check it themselves. If they find out there is something they do not understand, they can approach the teacher who will explain it and who can provide further practise.

Third, any additional materials the teacher considers helpful for students are classified in Useful materials. They are always linked with the topic and should offer students extra ideas or materials for study. The form can vary from a video (as it is the case here) to an audio or a link to a web page, etc.

The final section is represented by Review. This is a set of revision exercises which cover the whole topic. The Reviews combine several types of exercises: gap fill, matching or quiz. By completing the Reviews students reveal what they had not studied enough and what needs more effort from their part. The advantage of these Reviews is that they disclose the correct answers the moment the student submits the review which gives them a chance to think about it and analyze the wrong items. Thus the students are taught to work independently although they can always approach their teacher if they are

**Fig. 2: Submitted presentation**

<b>Started on</b>	Neděle, 26 duben 2009, 11:30
<b>Completed on</b>	Neděle, 26 duben 2009, 12:10
<b>Time taken</b>	40 mins 8 secs
<b>Marks</b>	39,8/43
<b>Grade</b>	9.26 out of a maximum of 10 (93%)

Page: [\(Previous\)](#) 1 2 3 4 [\(Next\)](#)  
[Show all questions on one page](#)

**2** **Complete the gaps.** Some letters have been given to help you.

Marks: 19/22

- In the Income Statement, you start with the Net Sales (income from trading activities), subtract the various costs and extra expenses, and you arrive at the Operating Profit (earnings from traditional activities of the business).
- The basic equation in the Balance Sheet is: Assets (things that the business owns) minus Liabilities (things that the business owes) equals Owner's Equity.
- In the old days, money owed to the company by its customers was referred to on the BS as 'debtors'; these days it is called accounts receivable. Equally, money owed by the company to its suppliers was referred to as 'creditors', while these days it is called accounts payable.
- A company's fixed assets are things that can't be turned easily into cash. They include plant and machinery (a factory and all its equipment), vehicles, etc.
- The items in the previous sentence lose value over time. This is referred to as depreciation.
- A single word that means 'all the people that a company employs and the money that each of them earns' is payroll.
- An important item on the cash flow statement of a manufacturing company will be its payments for raw materials (physical inputs to the production process).
- A company might have a one-time income from the sale of some land or the sale of a part of the business. This is referred to as extraordinary income.

First name: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

**Fig. 3: Extract from a review**

Page: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 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unable to understand why their wrong item is incorrect. The positive feature is that the student gets an immediate feedback and is taught to work systematically.

The review illustrated by Fig. 3 points out the advantages of e-learning. The assessment of revision exercises indicates the number of points obtained (the marks) and the corresponding evaluation in per cent. The correct answers are green and they are ticked as opposed to the incorrect items which are red and marked by a cross. If the student wishes to see the correct answer, they can move the mouse to the item in question to reveal it. Fig. 3 can as well serve as a demonstration of the fact about e-learning which has been mentioned above, i.e. the possibility to trace students' activity, the teacher knows when exactly the student attempted the review and how much time they spent on it. This is not the most important issue even if it can be applied with students who have a less conscientious approach to self-study when they claim to have spent hours on the exercises and in reality, they never accessed the review.

### **3. Brno University of Technology English Campus – BUTEC**

Following the positive experience with the use of electronic support and e-learning within English language classes at the Faculty of Mechanical engineering and the Faculty of Business Management it was decided to elaborate a project called BUTEC – Brno University of Technology English Campus. The project was approved and its implementation is planned for the years 2009–2012. It is supported by the European Social Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic within the Education for Competitiveness program.

The aim of the BUTEC project is to design and create an e-learning support for the study of English with the possibility of self-evaluation and systematic preparation for international City&Guilds examinations which can be sat at the Institute of Languages at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the Brno University of Technology. Its target is to offer a large support for the study of English both for students and employees at the BUT, to enable further development of their language skills. The result of BUTEC will be a “tailor-made” e-learning module, i.e. it will suit to students of the BUT with its topical vocabulary based on the requirements which are laid on BUT students.

The need for BUTEC arose from the fact that it was discovered that the number of language classes offered to students is very low to enable systematic consolidation of the language skills acquired and that the students missed an accessible tool for English language development and improvement. Also, there was a need to find a tool to supplement English classes and provide further language training.

The level of knowledge of the English language of students at the BUT differs at the beginning of their studies. Thus BUTEC would provide them with a source of self-study and enable them to complete their knowledge either at the beginning of a course or during a course. It will at the same time prove useful for students whose language knowledge lacks behind as well as for students who can further develop their good knowledge and search for improvement. As for the employees, BUTEC will offer them a source of language education and self-evaluation. Furthermore, the direct interconnection of BUTEC with various levels of City&Guilds international examinations will permit systematic and intentional preparation for the certificates.

The very first task every participant of the BUTEC e-learning module will have to do is to sit an interactive placement test which will assess their level of English according to the Common European Framework, assign them levels A1 to C2. The placement test will be followed by recommendations on how and what to study, i.e. which parts of the module.

The e-learning module will be accessible in the university information system and will use the virtual educational space Moodle. Thanks to that, it will be available to students and employees without any obstruction. Moreover, this form is known to students, they are familiar with it and therefore it will be user friendly for them. Prospective online support in the form of tutorials planned as part of the project will benefit from the link of the module with the information system (school addresses, students' logins, etc.). In addition, teachers will have the opportunity to see the results of students' work.

The e-learning module will consist of several parts. First, there will be a testing part in the form of the placement test mentioned above. Second, there will be a grammar part which will cover not only explanations in the form of presentations or downloadable materials or web pages but it will also allow practicing by employing interactive exercises. Another section will be devoted to vocabulary which will be subdivided according to topics and levels and will include audio recordings as well as interactive exercises. The e-learning module will provide practice in various ways, some examples follow: reading for understanding on various levels (including audio recordings), video recordings according to different levels (situation shots with tasks for understanding). BUTEC will also offer various sample



documents (e.g. a CV or a cover letter) and downloadable materials. It will as well include suggestions for self-study and links to other resources.

BUTEC, unlike commercial courses, will be free for its target group and its advantage is, as has been stated above, that it will be incorporated in the BUT information system, a system which the students and employees know well. The materials in BUTEC will also take into consideration the needs of the target group, especially students. By this is meant that it will include video recordings with supplementary activities focused on topics such as preparation for a study program abroad, job interview for BUT alumni, tips on how to study vocabulary, how to prepare and give a successful presentation or how to improve listening skills in English, etc.

At present, the project, which is planned for three years, is undergoing its initial stage. This is predominantly focused on training the members of the project team and on concrete formulation of individual key activities of BUTEC. Once the e-learning module is ready, it will nevertheless be possible to supplement it by additional materials according to current needs.

In brief, the e-learning module will become an indispensable source for self-study and further improvement. It will also supplement the classes, e.g. by providing reference to grammar. BUTEC will be a source to students who have completed their English classes and want to maintain their knowledge of English (this is a current problem because students can choose from a very limited number of optional English courses). Similarly, it will prove useful for students who are to study abroad and want to "brush up" their English before their foreign study. In addition to that, BUTEC will be a source for revision and language perfection before an examination (either in the course of studies at the BUT or when preparing for City&Guilds examination). Besides that, employees at the BUT will be able to use it as part of lifelong learning program.

## Conclusion

To sum up, providing e-learning support for English courses taught at the Institute of Foreign Languages has proven beneficial for the study process. As an integral part of the BUT information system, e-learning support (in the form of Moodle) enables an easy access and orientation for its users. As for the teachers, they possess a choice among a variety of activities which can be incorporated into their language courses. They can e.g. prepare interactive exercises for students to complete. These are consequently completed by students and assessed in e-learning, which saves time in class, time which can be devoted to other activities, e.g. speaking which students predominantly need. Or teachers can place downloadable materials into e-learning or ask students to download their assignments into e-learning. Assessing students' work straight in e-learning offers immediate feedback to students which is particularly significant for students in the combined form of study as their face to face contact with the teacher is less frequent than that of full-time students.

One of the biggest advantages of using e-learning in English language courses is that it teaches students to become more independent and responsible for their studies, they are shown that a great part of work, the biggest one, has to be done by themselves and that any tool they get can help them in their studies, nevertheless it is always their active participation which is vital. Therefore the BUTEC project described in this paper will offer space for self-study, revision or improvement and development of students' languages skills, let it be for a course or because of any international examination.

## References

[1] <http://www.uj.fme.vutbr.cz/butec/campus-en.html>

[2] <http://moodle.org/>

[3] <http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>