

The Application of e-Learning in Learning and Teaching ESP Based on the Example of e-Learning English Language Courses for Border Guard and Correctional Cadets of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

Elen Laanemaa

E-mail: elen.laanemaa@sisekaitse.ee

Language Centre - The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Estonia)

Abstract

The paper aims to present and share our practice in the field of the application of web-based language courses combined with contact classes in teaching ESP for border guard and correctional cadets of the Academy. While the history of employing e-learning in the process of learning and teaching ESP at our Academy goes back to only a few years, the application of ICT in the form of online courses is currently at the experimental level and is under constant improvement.

The urgent need for the application of ICT was and still is caused by the policy of the Academy to lessen the number of language classes. Thus, the aim of the web-based materials is primarily to be employed as home assignments meant to be worked on between contact classes.

The two above mentioned web-based courses were supported by European Funds, compiled in the framework of the project called BeST. Moreover, the courses were completed in dense collaboration with the specialists from Border Guard College and Border Guard Board, as well as the specialists and students of the field of corrections, involving also a visit to a female prison in Tallinn.

The web-based language courses are meant to be learnt both on individual bases or in combination with contact classes. They consist of 8 units (i.e. 8 different topics). Each unit comprises different tasks for practicing and acquiring new skills. The acquisition of language skills is supported and enhanced by the variety of tasks – reading comprehension tasks, listening tasks, watching videos, self-checking and different writing tasks. The written tasks are to be submitted and the teacher provides feedback about students' progress. Combining on-line materials with contact classes has provided cadets/students with the opportunity to apply individually acquired materials (e.g. vocabulary) to oral practical tasks, disputes and discussions with group mates.

The courses have both undergone so called testing period, i.e. first 4 groups of cadets have done it through. Now, after having received oral and written feedback from students, some conclusions can be drawn. Problems with the Internet, new experimental tasks, lack of students' computer skills and not being able to get access to some tasks (due to some obstacles caused by the third party) have been mentioned as drawbacks of the application of ICT in learning languages. Concerning the advantages, the students have mentioned the variety of tasks, self-check, individual learning space, individual learning speed, no time frame, individual feedback and the possibility to employ the acquired language skills orally in contact classes. Still, there are quite a lot of students, especially among long-distance students who prefer only contact classes and are not thrilled about the future of learning languages online.