First Steps in Building Emergent View on Teaching and Learning Armenian as a Second Language via Technology

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the effectiveness of learning Armenian as a Second Language with the use of technology that helps to cover challenges of education and preservation of the national and cultural identity of Armenians in Diaspora via language are considered in the study.

The research is conducted basing on the online teaching and instructing experience under large number of students of different age, educational background and origin.

Basing on the multiyear maintenance of the built system it is concluded that one of the biggest advantages of the system is guidance and facilitation in the personal environment via Online Instructor (OI) which gives students the possibility to learn and acquire language through natural communication, interaction and discussions with OI and classmates.

A brief overview of the chosen online pedagogy principles and used approaches for their effectiveness measurement jointly with the implementation peculiarities is performed.

Keywords

e-learning, online instructing, online pedagogy, hybrid education, blinded course

1. INTRODUCTION

The total number of Armenians living outside the country is estimated to be around 8 to 10 million. Armenians living all over the world are forming in total a big community – Armenian Diaspora and the most important mission of the diaspora is to preserve the national and cultural identity of Armenians. In order to spread these values among the new generations schools and cultural centers are established by church and various appropriate organizations. At the same time due to essential and mainly global changes including destruction of old community centers with much less replacement by newly arisen centers, reduction of relative/kin and family tight links, delocalization and reduction of Armenian population in former diaspora centers, Armenian education became currently drastically less available to every member of the community.

This study aims to present how to increase the effectiveness of learning Armenian as a Second Language (ASL) with the use of technology and to cover challenges described above.

A broad scope of topics is considered at Armenian Virtual College [1] including:

- personal environments for learner oriented teaching,
- development of natural language processing in the part of reading and learning vocabulary independently,
- different modalities of assessment processes,
- mobile- and multimedia-assisted learning,
- interaction over a blog or other Web communication means in a cross-cultural exchange between learners including native and non-native speakers of Armenian, in analyzing and interpreting museums, galleries, etc.
- use of all three communication, interaction and discussion modes: board, text chat, and videoconferencing during learning and teaching,
- creating friendly and supportive atmosphere for learners, encouraging and stimulating to learn new language,
- use of online tutoring and instructing during teaching and learning processes.

The use of listed innovative technology provides learners around the world with the opportunity to study any subject they want, regardless of their age, country of residence, or knowledge level.

Various forms of work, tasks and activities were conducted to achieve these goals. Analyzed data on practical experience allows us to conclude that the personality and interests of the student directly affected the quality of language. To get better results it was necessary to implement a variety of techniques and learning tools within interesting and effective methods and approaches.

The research is conducted basing on the online teaching experience with a large number of students of different age, educational background and origin (over 4400 students from 83 countries, spread from Georgia to China, from Sweden to South Africa and from Argentina to Canada).

In the frame of the study the effectiveness of ASL acquisition taught online trough mentioned technology was thoroughly tested including corresponding mobile applications and Multimedia Podcast Series. One of the biggest advantages of this type of learning is guidance and facilitation in the personal environment via Online Instructor (OI). This environment gives students the possibility to learn and acquire language through natural communication, interaction and discussions with OI and classmates.

2. ACQUIRED PEDAGOGY PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES FOR INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE INSTRUCTING

Among a broad scope of publications dedicated to online pedagogy we have chosen and listed below those which most influenced the AVC implementation in the part of online instructing.

In [2] basing on findings from cognitive psychology it is explored how attention, memory, and higher thought

processes such as critical thinking can be enhanced through technology-aided approaches. We have adopted innovative ideas presented there for how to use multimedia effectively, how to take advantage of learners' existing knowledge, and how to motivate students to work better and successfully complete the course for the ASL study. This is reflected in the implemented AVC templates for online instructing,

In [3] perspectives from two fields of inquiry and practice are brought together: "literacies and learning" and "learning technologies." It is illustrated how complementary and contrasting approaches to literacy and technology can be brought together in productive ways. This led to adding better flexibility in corresponding templates of online instructing that gives a possibility to combine complementary approaches in one earning process.

Implications for digitally delivered higher education and educators' guidelines in [4] (chapter 9) were used for increasing the effectiveness of the built AVC learning management system.

In [5, 6] an advanced introduction to and analysis of the key issues relating to the integration of digital culture and education in the society is performed including consideration of digital culture related educational challenges oriented to individual emancipation and social transformation simultaneously with accuses of absorbing recipients of digital culture in the boundless and intensively pervasive virtual world. In the current version of AVC no regulations are implemented relating to the considered issues, finding of a balance is performed manually basing on outputs of regular weekly meetings of the online instructors' team.

In [7, 8] a practical guidance and comprehensive examples on how digital technology can enhance student engagement in the subject, impact on knowledge retention, get students learning outside the classroom, and help them to work collaboratively. This guidance is reflected in performed regularly OI trainings at AVC.

Understanding the difficulties of formulating a mature and consistent set of online pedagogy principles [9] we have concentrated our attention on implementation of the following three simply formulated principles adduced in [10].

Principle #1: Let the students do (most of) the work.

Principle #2: Interactivity is the heart and soul of effective asynchronous learning.

Principle #3: Strive for presence.

All the corresponding instructing flow at AVC, templates for building a personal environment, a guidance and facilitation in the personal environment via 24 hours available Online Instructor (OI) which gives students the possibility to learn and acquire language through natural communication, interaction and discussions with OI and classmates are implemented using the mentioned above 3 principles**.**

The next challenge which had to be addressed after the development of the mentioned templates is how to increase the pedagogical effectiveness of the implemented principles.

It is suggested in [11, 12] to examine student choice, learning experience, and level of satisfaction with a **hyflex course** – i.e. a course that combines elements of both online and classroom-based learning in so called hybrid classes taking learners to a new level of flexibility. As per the publication students reported very high levels of satisfaction (9.44 average out of 10) and positive/meaningful learning experiences. Most appreciated were the flexibility and convenience. In other words, robust teaching methods are more imperative for student learning than the medium of delivery and almost the same learning is reached from taking a purely online course instead of a course that includes face-to-face instruction. The only request is to promote an interactive virtual community with immediate feedback during the process of learning.

In [13] it is shown how the technology increase the positive effect for the mentioned model of learning.

We have broadly implemented the idea of hyflex and the corresponding technology support at AVC and currently have several schools in the AVC network based on hyflex courses for ASL.

It is shown in [14] that online components encourage self-regulated learning. Use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) increases the effectiveness of the process, it is student achievement and course retention oriented in blending and distance learning, large group settings.

AVC is using Moodle platform [15] which has a powerful basis for building a comprehensive LMS which is very important for AVC already operating and instructing a big amount of students.

In [16, 17, 18] again advantages of the hybrid education model are considered. Per students reports the instructional technology designed to allow online attendance made the subject more interesting, increased their understanding, and encouraged participation via technology. There was no significant difference in grades between those who attended in person vs. online. In [17] a mature case study is performed. It is suggested how to create an effective online community for courses that are either taught entirely online or as hybrid. It is mentioned there that nstructors must pay careful attention to relationship between technology and pedagogy. Online activities conceptually mimic in-class discussions, allow students to understand their learning and at the same time instructors become able to monitor understanding of the material by students. The mentioned conclusions were reflected during the implementation of the software infrastructure for AVC.

3. SOME STATISTICS

The number of students completed courses in Armenian Virtual College (AVC) from 2009 to 2017 makes 8 800. 25% of all students were enrolled in History and Culture Department and 75% in Armenian Language Department. 55% students of language department completed Western Armenian courses and 45% of students completed Eastern Armenian courses.

4. CONCLUSION

The suggested approach was applied to different nodes of the AVC network including students of different ages and level of education, classes in hybrid schools, individual learners, etc. Experimental results show that even in the case when not all parameters of the developed templates and software are engaged in the consideration, we still obtain good statistics on effectiveness of the implemented approach for online instructing.

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