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## **RAISING THE LEVEL OF MOTIVATION OF ECONOMICS STUDENTS FOR STUDYING ENGLISH USING THE MYENGLISHLAB BLENDED LEARNING PLATFORM**

ELEVAMOS EL NIVEL DE MOTIVACIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE ECONOMÍA PARA ESTUDIAR INGLÉS UTILIZANDO LA PLATAFORMA DE APRENDIZAJE MEZCLADO MYENGLISHLAB

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### ABSTRACT

The primary task of today's higher education is to ensure efficient and quality training of economics students. At present, this training cannot be provided without modern approaches to education, which make lessons productive and interesting not only for students who freely use modern electronic devices but also for teachers as they provide optimization of the learning process. One of the current methods of foreign language teaching with active use of information technology is the use of the MyEnglishLab interactive platform for learning English. The paper presents an analysis of the platform's possibilities as an innovative tool for teaching English to economics students in the blended learning format that focuses on the development of communication skills, enhances the individualization of learning, and forms sustainable motivation for foreign language activities. The results of the experimental study convincingly testify to the positive changes in the distribution of motives for learning English and the attitude of future economists to mastering a foreign language. This confirms the efficiency of using the platform in the professional foreign language training of students and exerting a positive influence on their motivational sphere.

### Keywords:

Learning motivation, blended learning, students, future economists, English, MyEnglishLab.

### RESUMEN

La tarea primordial de la educación superior actual es garantizar una formación eficiente y de calidad de los estudiantes de economía. En la actualidad, esta formación no se puede proporcionar sin enfoques modernos de la educación, que hacen que las lecciones sean productivas e interesantes no solo para los estudiantes que utilizan libremente los dispositivos electrónicos modernos, sino también para los profesores, ya que optimizan el proceso de aprendizaje. Uno de los métodos actuales de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras con uso activo de las tecnologías de la información es el uso de la plataforma interactiva MyEnglishLab para el aprendizaje del inglés. El artículo presenta un análisis de las posibilidades de la plataforma como una herramienta innovadora para enseñar inglés a estudiantes de economía en el formato de aprendizaje combinado que se enfoca en el desarrollo de habilidades de comunicación, mejora la individualización del aprendizaje y forma una motivación sostenible para las actividades en idiomas extranjeros. Los resultados del estudio experimental dan testimonio convincente de los cambios positivos en la distribución de los motivos para aprender inglés y la actitud de los futuros economistas para dominar un idioma extranjero. Esto confirma la eficacia del uso de la plataforma en la formación profesional de lenguas extranjeras de los estudiantes y de ejercer una influencia positiva en su ámbito motivacional.

### Palabras clave:

Motivación para el aprendizaje, blended learning, estudiantes, futuros economistas, inglés, MyEnglishLab.

## INTRODUCTION

For the past few years, English language teaching has been undergoing major changes. There is an emerging need to solve a range of didactic tasks faced by economics students: forming reading abilities and skills using materials of varying levels of complexity (Bogatyreva et al., 2022); perfecting listening skills based on authentic audio texts; improving writing skills and enriching vocabulary (both active and passive) with the modern English lexicon that reflects the particular stage of economic development and socio-economic and political structure of society; improving students' knowledge of economics; refining their knowledge of grammar through tests; forming a strong motivation for learning (Panikarova et al., 2021); instilling the need to use English for real-life communication with the use of advanced methods and technologies (Kuznetsova & Miakisheva, 2014).

The practical experience of teaching English demonstrates that at the current stage of education the most efficient way to achieve didactic goals is through blended learning (Zenin et al., 2021, Pivneva et al., 2022). However, the problem of using modern multimedia technology that allows combining all types of materials in a single course for the effective training of economics students under the guidance of the teacher remains little studied, which determines the relevance of the present research topic.

Professional foreign language training for economics students calls for new advanced teaching tools, including multimedia technology (Kirillov et al., 2018), which contributes to the modernization of the entire process of learning English in higher education (Ziganshina, 2012). Since the level of students' learning and cognitive activities is shaped by the system of motives and goals, there arises the need to research the interaction of students' motivational sphere as a factor in the efficiency of learning with the integration of multimedia technology in the professional foreign language training (Zenin et al., 2021).

Psychologists note that the success of the professional training of future specialists is contingent on a variety of factors, the leading role among which is played by motives (reasons for learning), attitudes (psychological disposition, readiness for the activity), cognitive needs and interests, determination, and other volitional qualities of the student (Pivneva et al., 2022).

The structure of a student's motives, which are formed during higher education, is the core of the personality of a future specialist. This structure consists of intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Intrinsic motives include the social significance of learning and professional and cognitive motives (Panikarova et al., 2021). Extrinsic motives, on the

other hand, are oriented on values outside of learning: material incentives, personal interests, communication, and prestige (Batarshev, 2014).

Among the consistent motives that drive economics students and direct their learning activities towards mastering professional English, we can distinguish the desire for constant self-study and self-improvement, cognitive interests, the need to master English as part of the profession, and an active attitude towards learning English and acquiring professional knowledge.

One of the ways to raise the level of learning motivation among students, which many specialists believe contributes to the effectiveness of their professional foreign language training (Ezhova et al., 2021), is the use of online educational platforms. The latter are modern online resources for blended and distance learning of student youth that are designed to provide them with video materials, notes, tests, and the opportunity to track their academic progress (Molchanskaia, 2017).

The choice of the online platform for the educational process has to comply with particular criteria, developing the professional features of basic educational components. Specifically, this refers to the didactic features of learning as the stimulation of students' intellectual activity, enhancement of learning motivation, and development of self-education, self-analysis, and reflection skills (Klimova et al., 2019).

Alakrash & Razak (2021), offers a universal classification of online platforms distinguishing six main types: 1) content management and learning management systems; 2) applied software or apps; 3) social media; 4) video conferencing software; 5) online courses; 6) advanced linguistic multimedia labs.

Quadoud et al. (2018), proposes to consider online educational platforms as educational control pedagogical software, which are designed for students to acquire and monitor knowledge, skills, and abilities on either their own or under the guidance of a teacher using distance learning technologies (Arkhipov et al., 2019). In particular, Chen & Tseng (2012), attributes to such technologies electronic manuals posted on teachers' webpages, distance courses, multimedia educational courses, computer software, and electronic training tools available on a PC or online.

In the context of studying English, Wang & Huang (2019) point out the methodological interest of online platforms that offer training differentiated by the levels of language proficiency. The scholars also propose classifying all online platforms into two groups, the first including platforms

for learning English and the second – specialized online courses.

In practice, both types of online platforms enjoy popularity (Prasojo et al., 2017). Thus, our further research will focus on the characteristics and possibilities of the application of MyEnglishLab – an online platform for studying English, which is actively used in the training and development of professional foreign language competence of economics students in English classes.

Vymetalkova & Milkova (2019), indicates that MyEnglishLab is an innovative online platform that offers various types of activities in different formats for learning English; provides personalized feedback; allows completing tasks 24/7; supports various learning styles; gives students a large number of supervised PC-based practical assignments that can be done anywhere at any time. The platform contains different types of exercises: vocabulary, grammar, writing, listening, reading, and exercises after watching a video.

MyEnglishLab, same as other similar platforms (Zhou & Zhang, 2022), relies on the principles of individualization (opportunity to work independently) and differentiation (the necessary exercises of specific difficulty can be chosen and proposed in the amount and order that matches students' cognitive abilities and their level of knowledge and skills).

The primary didactic functions performed by MyEnglishLab are learning, development (contributing to the development of such vital cognitive skills as perception, logical thinking, memory, and imagination), training (opportunity to independently practice and check the level of knowledge and skills in a given topic, identify specific gaps, work on them, and perform the provided tasks several times more to improve the results), diagnostic (the teacher can quickly monitor and determine the level of students' mastery of the training topic), and communication (by engaging in dialogue with the computer, students overcome the barrier of fear of communication) (Vymetalkova, Milkova, 2019).

The goal of the present study is to identify the possibilities of the platform as a means to improve the level of learning motivation to study English among economics students.

The established goal is achieved through the following objectives:

1. to analyze the role and importance of MyEnglishLab in teaching English in higher education in the blended learning format;

2. to cover the development and introduction of educational materials on the platform;

3. to experimentally test the efficiency of MyEnglishLab as a tool to improve the level of learning motivation to study English among economics students.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To determine the efficiency of MyEnglishLab as an instrument to improve learning motivation to study English, we conducted an experiment with 2nd-year economics students. The total sample included 178 students with 91 people in the experimental group (EG) and 87 in the control group (CG).

During the 2nd semester of the 2021-2022 academic year, students in the EG were additionally trained using the platform. The training of CG students in English was conducted without the use of MyEnglishLab.

The program of experimental training of future economists was designed to examine the impact of the learning and cognitive activities using MyEnglishLab on the motivational sphere of students. The experimental training was conducted under the condition of comprehensive use of both traditional teaching tools (textbooks, training manuals, audio and video materials, periodicals, television) and MyEnglishLab materials that fit the topics and objectives of lessons. Here we should note that students' learning motives and their distribution, which reflect attitudes toward learning English, are indicators of the motivational criterion of the professional foreign language competence of economics students.

At the first stage of the pedagogical experiment, an entry diagnostic was conducted to rank the main motives of economics students that motivate them to study English (Table 1). The questionnaire created for this purpose was based on the adapted method for diagnosing students' learning motivation (A.A. Rean and V.A. Iakunin, as modified by N.T.S. Badmaeva (2004)).

The proposed ranking of motives for studying English included: 1) the social motive reflecting awareness of the social significance of knowing English; 2) the learning motive directly associated with learning activities, the content of the educational process, and acquiring new knowledge of English; 3) the professional motive – desire for self-determination and self-realization through knowledge of English; 4) the communicative motive, which defines satisfaction of the need for communication with foreigners; 5) the motive of social prestige, which manifests in the desire to achieve success by means of one's knowledge and skills in English, is accompanied by a sense of dignity and self-respect, and contributes to better self-esteem; 6)

the utilitarian motive associated with gaining some benefit from learning English; 7) the motive of self-realization that encourages the individual to self-improvement, self-development, and self-discovery; 8) the motive of avoidance of failure – an enforced motive due to the need to learn English since it is required by the curriculum.

At the second stage of the pedagogical experiment, to enhance learning motivation, a portion of tasks from the main learning materials (the textbook and audio and video materials) were replaced by MyEnglishLab materials, the content of which had a communicative-cognitive and personality-oriented direction. This organization of learning was intended to raise the parameters of the professional and learning motives of economics students since they are decisive in the distribution of motives for the study of English. These two motives are the ones that direct the learning activities of economics students and make mastering English creative and productive. Particular attention was paid to professionally-oriented tasks associated with the future professional practice of students, which undoubtedly affected their level of interest and evoked a positive attitude toward the course.

The first stage of the experiment involved a survey of students after the completion of experimental training to compare the results (Table 2) and determine the influence of MyEnglishLab on the development of learning motivation.

Statistical data processing was performed with Statistica 7.0 software. The reliability of parameters in the groups was tested by the nonparametric Pearson’s test ( $\chi^2$ ). Calculation of the criterion values and confidence intervals was performed at the given significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of motives for learning English among economics students at the beginning of the experimental study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of motives for studying English among economics students at the beginning of the experimental training.

Group social		Motive							
		learning	professional	communica-tive	prestige	utilitarian	self-realization	avoidance of failure	
EG (91 students)	motive rank	VIII	VI	V	I	II	III	VII	IV
	% of the maximum score	14.2	16.5	18.5	43.4	31.2	24.4	16.2	18.8
CG (87 students)	motive rank	VIII	V	VI	I	II	III	VII	IV
	% of the maximum score	13.7	18.6	17.7	48.6	27.9	22.1	15.3	19.3

As demonstrated in Table 1, at the beginning of experimental training the leading motives among students in the EG and CG were the communicative motive (43.4%/48.6%) and the motive of social prestige (31.2%/27.9%). This suggests that learning activities are generally characterized by positive motivation. However, the professional and learning motives, which play a critical part in students’ mastery of professional foreign-language speech, rank only fifth and sixth in the EG and CG. Importantly, the professional motive emphasizes the desire of future specialists to establish themselves in future professional practice through knowledge and skills of foreign language communication, the desire of the individual for self-determination, and the desire to make a successful career. The learning motive, in turn, affects the student’s ability to work actively in class, be creative and independent, navigate the information space, and organize their learning and working activities.

The distribution of motives for learning English among economics students after completing the experimental training is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of motives for studying English among economics students after experimental training.

Group social		Motive							
		learning	professional	communicative	prestige	utilitarian	self-realization	avoidance of failure	
EG1 (91 students)	motive rank	VI	I	II	III	V	VII	IV	VIII
	% of the maximum score	29.4	85.2	79.3	70.3	52.4	17.4	60.3	12.7
CG (87 students)	motive rank	VIII	V	VI	I	II	III	VII	IV
	% of the maximum score	13.9	19.1	18.4	49.4	27.6	22.8	16.5	20.3

The observed positive change in the structure of learning motivation can be explained by the fact that experimental training was conducted under the condition of integrated use of traditional learning tools and MyEnglishLab possibilities and materials, which promoted the positive motivation and interest of economics students in the profession overall, as well obtaining the knowledge necessary, in particular, to master professional foreign-language speech. As noted by expert Batarshv (2014), whose opinion we share, students' positive attitude to learning and the level of their interest in the subject are important factors in the success of the entire process of foreign language training and the motivation behind it.

The tasks on the MyEnglishLab interactive platform were performed in three stages. Stage 1 involved the formation of lexical and grammar skills on the topic; students learned new vocabulary and grammar and improved their language skills by listening to and repeating phrases and sentences while having the opportunity to see how effectively they were doing it. At stage 2, the language skills and the use of those phrases and sentences that were learned during the first stage were further improved in dialogue with the computer; students performed exercises, whose purpose was computer testing of variants with the correct answer. Stage 3 was intended to develop the skills of applying the lexical and grammar knowledge acquired in the previous two stages; students were offered tasks with the use of authentic audio and video materials.

In assigning exercises to students, the platform has options to choose the number of tries to perform both test and training exercises, the time frame for the exercises, etc. (Vymetalkova, Milkova, 2019). Aside from exercises, the teacher can assign students a test on the material they have covered, which allows them to test the quality of knowledge of a considerable number of students within a fairly limited time. Assessment in this case is more objective and is performed at a pre-planned level. During the completion of these kinds of tasks, attention is fixed not on the formulation of the answer, but on the comprehension of its essence, which saves time and creates conditions for constant feedback.

The teacher sees the results of the assignments on their page in a summary table, which contains information about the number of completed assignments and the results of their performance given as a percentage of correct answers and the final grade. All grades can be exported, which provides an archive of results and engagement of students in the assignments (Zhou & Zhang, 2022).

Working with a computer not only promotes students' interest in learning but also provides an opportunity for early diagnostics. By clicking on the "Diagnostics" option and reviewing the activity grades, the teacher can get additional information about each student's work, including the time spent on each exercise, the number of tries, and the result of each exercise. In this way, the teacher can also find students who make a lot of mistakes and require assistance. In this case, additional tasks in MyEnglishLab were assigned to give these students more practice.

Each time a student made a mistake, MyEnglishLab responded with feedback, encouraging the student to learn from their mistakes and have another try. We concur with D. Vymetalkova and E. Milkova (2019) on their point that such work significantly reduces the time to check the assignments, track students' progress, and adjust the degree of difficulty of assignments, as well as eliminates one of the most prominent causes of negative attitudes toward learning – academic failure due to lack of understanding of the material or gaps in knowledge.

## CONCLUSIONS

MyEnglishLab is an effective and expedient tool for teaching English in a blended format. This platform focuses on the development of communication skills and allows for enhancing the individualization of learning, optimizing the study of language structures and grammar rules, as well as overcoming the monotony of English lessons. Application of MyEnglishLab realizes an entire set of methodological, didactic, pedagogical, and psychological principles in addition to increasing the efficiency of solving communicative tasks, developing different types of speech activity, and forming a stable motivation for the foreign language activity of economics students.

The conducted experiment comparing the levels of motivation to study English among economics students reveals a positive dynamic in students who studied with the use of MyEnglishLab and, on the other hand, the lack of a positive change in the motivation of students who studied without the platform.

To the limitations of the study, we can attribute the professional orientation of experiment participants, who were economics students, which does not allow for assessing the efficiency of using the MyEnglishLab platform as a tool for increasing the learning motivation to study English in other specialties. The prospect of further research involves studying the role of MyEnglishLab in classes on English for Professional Purposes as an effective tool for blended learning.

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