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Instructional Design of an Integrative Online Business English Course for Master's Students of a Technical University

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Abstract: The article deals with the instructional design of an integrative Business English course for master's students of a technical university (a case study of the Saint Petersburg Mining University) for blended and/or flexible learning. The main goal is to design a course that can be used as a full-fledged online course in asynchronous learning and is at the same time adjustable to the existing offline Business English course. The research uses methods such as observation, focus groups, surveying, empirical research and analytical and descriptive methods. The authors see a solution in a special instructional design based on the integration of traditional teaching approaches in offline learning, information technology and elements of infotainment and edutainment. The article presents the results of the target audience analysis and the needs analysis, outlines the structure of the course, specifies approaches to enhance motivation in master's students and presents an integrative system of assessment and evaluation of the learners' knowledge and skills. The key features of the instructional design of the Business English course suggested include exposure to professional scenarios, learners' reflection, multiple instruments encouraging learners' cognitive activity and performance and an opportunity to apply their knowledge to actual performance rather than summative assessment.

Keywords: distance learning; online course; instructional design; Business English; master's students; integration; interaction; multimedia; formative assessment

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, distance communication has become part of our life. ELearning, viz and mass open online courses (MOOCs) are being integrated significantly into the contemporary educational landscape, literally, through academic curricula. It has been proven that 'the use of modern electronic learning tools and different applications turns the process of learning more productive and significantly enhances the learning motivation of students' [1] (p. 401) and 'allows us to substantially improve the quality of training of specialists' [2] (p. 507).

It is true that 'scientific and philosophical comprehension shall facilitate such decisions that could have an impact on the progressive development of the society' [3] (p. 761). Therefore, 'in the context of economic globalization, international recognition of professional competences becomes essentially important for engineers' [4] (p. 374). We also take into account that a 'great number of graduates of technical universities consider employment in multinational companies as an excellent chance to gain relevant work experience and become competitive candidates in the global labour market' [5] (p. 373). Recent research shows that 'the notion of "success" (correlated with "my university", "sciences" and "foreign languages") is of the highest importance among future engineers' [6] (p. 856).

Different models and schemes are always under study at Saint Petersburg Mining University, including how to 'improve students' language and soft skills with the help of creative technologies' [7] (p. 629); to develop 'lexical skills in both language exercises and

communicative ones' [8] (p. 295); to organise 'a set of technical texts selected according to the course goal' [9] (p. 152); and to 'enhance motivation of the future specialists in the fields of engineering to foreign language learning' [10] (p. 8).

Thus, there is a demand for technical specialists capable of integrating successfully into the international professional community. Nowadays, soft skills outweigh hard skills in many professional domains. However, developing soft skills in technical specialists is often underestimated, because hard skills are more important in most industries. One can hardly employ an engineer with poor hard skills in the mining or IT industry. At the same time, a good balance of hard skills and soft skills could form a high-level specialist who will meet multiple challenges of their professional life. To develop their soft skills in English, engineering master's students need an ESP course and an efficient Business English course customised to their profession.

The current challenges in distance learning still include its efficiency; govern-mental policy in distance learning; the demand for diversification of online courses; employers' interest in online certificates and their credibility; new syllabi and curriculum formats changing the infrastructure of universities; and the changing role of the instructor (lecturer) [11]. Lack of standards in distance learning causes a growing need for instructional design of online courses. Another key question is how to create an efficient and motivational online course for the target audience. Unmotivated learners will most likely not retain much information. Lack of immediate assistance when ambiguous information is presented may hinder learning. Additionally, low computer literacy may prevent learners from fully benefitting from the learning experience [12].

In eLearning, 'the use of digital and reflective technologies are the key criteria in a new methodological paradigm' [13] (p. 215). There have been many attempts to create an effective online course wherein 'the authors faced the task of creating their own text content for different modules of the online course that could be interesting for the target audience' and 'meet the professional interests of potential learners' [14] (p. 145).

Now, in distance learning, instructional design for online synchronous and asynchronous courses is of great interest. The concept of "instructional design" has been among the research interests of many foreign (R. M. Gagne, R. M. Branch, W. Dick, L. Carey, J. O. Carey, L. J. Briggs, M. D. Merrill, S. McNeil) and Russian (A. Uvarov, E. V. Abyzova, M. V. Moiseeva, E. V. Tikhomirova, M. N. Krasnyansky) researchers for a long time. Instructional design is a discipline that investigates the effectiveness of learning materials and tools that create favorable situations, conditions and learning environments. The process involves designing, creating, implementing and evaluating learning situations. Instructional design involves analyzing the needs of the target audience, setting goals and learning objectives, choosing and forming a system of ways to transfer and control knowledge, creating a unique educational environment [15–17]. The key characteristics of instructional design are that it is learner-centric, goal-oriented, empirical and focused on real-world performance and measured outcomes [18,19].

The aim of the research is to design an online Business English course that can be used as a full-fledged online course in asynchronous learning and is at the same time adjustable to the existing offline ESP and Business English courses (using a case study of Saint Petersburg Mining University), or to design distance synchronous learning that could better prepare engineering master's students studying English for international collaboration, and meet the challenges of the current learning process. The main objectives of the research are: (1) to conduct a comparative analysis of existing Business English courses; (2) to carry out a target audience analysis and a needs analysis (a case study of master's students at Saint Petersburg Mining University); (3) to set the objectives and outcomes of an integrative Business English course; (4) to design the structure and content of the course; and (5) to test Part 1 of the course and evaluate its effectiveness.

2. Materials and Methods

This research took place at Saint Petersburg Mining University from September 2020 to December 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during this period of time universities and institutes had to shift to online educational processes. Consequently, many teachers and scientists working at universities carried out research studying the challenges of online education [20–23]. At Saint Petersburg Mining University, there was also a necessity to change to online studying for some time. The teachers of the university analysed the challenges of online learning and thought about the use of different methods and technologies to make the teaching process more efficient. Designing an online Business English course was one such attempt. The research involved three academic terms and covered three groups of master's students, with one term of the offline Business English course as scheduled. The research uses methods such as observation, empirical research, surveying, focus groups and analytical and descriptive methods.

Our longitude observations and empirical research let us identify the gap between what master's students expect to do in English in their future professional life and what they learn to do in English within their offline Business English course, and to specify the needs of our target audience. We have carried out a series of surveys among 60 master's students studying technical disciplines at Saint Petersburg Mining University to find out their expectations of their English language competencies in their future professional life. Analytical and descriptive methods helped us conduct a comparative analysis of existing online Business English courses, a target audience analysis and a needs analysis. In addition, we used a focus group to test some of the modules of the integrative course that we are designing.

Among multiple instructional design models, we chose the ADDIE model that includes: (1) analysing the learning environment, the target audience and setting goals and objectives of training (Analysis); (2) planning the development of instructional activities (Design); (3) developing instructional activities (Development); (4) implementing the course into the educational process (Implementation); and (5) evaluating the effectiveness of the course (Evaluation) [24–27].

The ADDIE method is considered to be the most appropriate to be used for creating an online course as it counts on a specific target audience and presents the sequence of presentations of educational material based on the skills and abilities students already possess. The clearly defined steps of the ADDIE model not only advance a new course into the educational programme, but enhance the cognitive activity of students.

3. Results

3.1. Outcome 1: Comparative Analysis of Business English Online Courses

Many learning platforms offer multiple Business English courses. As an example, just Coursera offers 3566 Business English courses or courses covering related subject matters. We have conducted a *comparative analysis* of 18 Business English online courses on different platforms from different language schools (other than Coursera). The analysis shows that 10 out of 18 courses are targeted at a wide non-specific audience, 16 out of 18 courses have inconsistent content, 11 out of 18 courses promise vague objectives and outcomes, and only one course is free.

Thus, the course we are designing should: (1) be targeted at master's students majoring in technical disciplines; (2) cover as many business subject matters as possible; (3) offer clear and concise learning trajectories from simple to complex subject matters; (4) train grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and communication skills simultaneously; (5) blend synchronous online and offline courses; (6) be adjustable to different learning formats; and (7) appeal to learners with different levels of English.

3.2. Outcome 2: Target Audience Analysis

A target audience analysis usually includes (1) information on demographics; (2) learners' motivation; and (3) their background knowledge. As for demographics, a survey of

60 students at Saint Petersburg Mining University shows that our target audience includes mostly male bachelors with diverse cultural backgrounds (most of them belong to Russian and CIS cultures). As the average age of our learners is 21 to 23, they belong to Generation Y or Millennials (also named Generation Y and the Net Generation), born between 1982 and 2004, according to the Strauss–Howe generational theory. To make our course efficient, we consider their learning habits and preferences: these learners choose eLearning, they like hands-on activities, and prefer learning through social learning tools such as blogs, podcasts and mobile applications. One of our surveys proves that our target audience like watching short videos (56%) and participating actively in their learning (44%). We also assume that our target audience includes auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners. Most of the learners have a high level of computer literacy.

Our target audience is highly motivated; most of them want to take the course because they want to work in international companies and/or projects, and make careers. Many of the career conscious students are aware of the role of English in their future work. Most of the respondents need this course in order to: (1) obtain new knowledge or skills (31%); (2) get a job in an international company (47%); (3) keep their current job (2%); or (4) get a promotion in their career (16%). It is also possible that some of the learners will only take this course because it is scheduled by their curriculum (4%).

The students have some background knowledge, as they studied a General English course and an ESP course within their bachelor's curriculum. Figures 1 and 2 show that most of the surveyed students are aware of multiple activities they are likely to perform in English in their future professional life. However, most of them find it difficult, or can only perform the activities with a help of the internet (downloading a text, using Google translate, etc.).

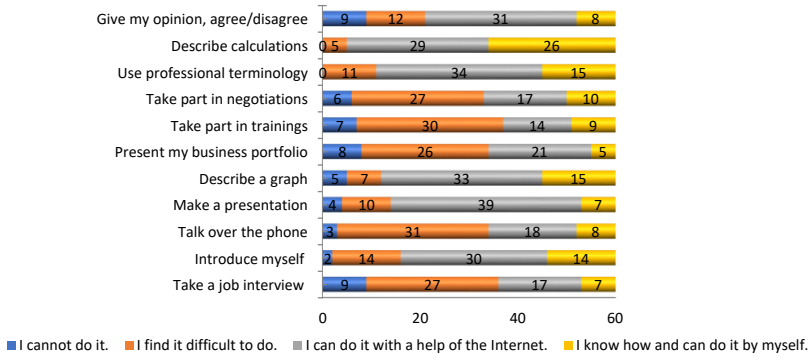


Figure 1. The results of 60 students' self-assessment of their performance in speaking activities they expect to do in English at work.

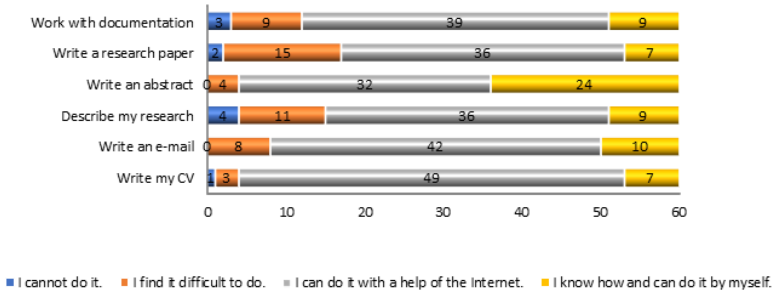


Figure 2. The results of 60 students' self-assessment of their performance in writing activities they expect to do in English at work.

3.3. Outcome 3: Needs Analysis

The integrative Business English course we are designing is specifically targeted at master's students of technical specialties aiming to succeed in the international workplace. One of the main features is that the course should blend with the existing offline ESP and

Business English courses at Saint Petersburg Mining University. Our empirical research shows that the learning groups often include learners with different levels of English, from beginners to advanced learners. Most of them have from average to poor English speaking and listening skills. One of our surveys shows that most of the students can devote from 30 min to 1 h to training in the evenings.

Thus, we need to design an online course adjustable to the offline course and covering all the necessary knowledge and skills. Such a blended course should be flexible, logical and motivational at the same time. For example, students may learn an online module and bring this knowledge and skill to demonstrate and (self-)assess in an offline class or on a distance class. A syllabus will explain to the learners the system of the course, the approaches to learning and options for learning, and show the criteria for knowledge and skills assessment before the course starts.

3.4. Outcome 4: The Course Design

3.4.1. Course Learning Objectives

At the design stage, the instructional designer (SME, author) of the course needs to clearly formulate the objectives of the training and understand how the learning out-comes will be measured (evaluated). For Robert Mager, objectives should be measurable and observable, and include four components: Audience, Behaviour, Condition, and Degree (the A-B-C-D format) [28]. Together with this, objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely) and focus on the result rather than the activities, and allow learners to measure their own success. We formulate the objectives of our course according to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (that arranges cognitive processes at six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) and Bloom's taxonomy [29] rearranged by L. W. Anderson and D. R. Krathwohl (remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating) [30]. We also consider Allan Carrington's Pedagogy Wheel, a model for planning academic activities embracing the competencies of graduate students in the 21st century [31]. Table 1 (below) shows the objectives of the course that we are designing.

Table 1. The structure of an integrative online Business English course for master's students.

Part 1 **Beginner-Elementary**	**Part 2** **Pre-Intermediate**	**Part 3** **Intermediate**	**Part 4** **Upper Intermediate**
Objectives Upon completing Part 1, learners should be able to introduce themselves; carry out a small talk; prepare his/her CV and cover letter; take/give a job interview; maintain networking; present a company structure; understand office management and use the business and professional terminology learnt in this part.	Objectives Upon completing Part 2, learners should be able to assess and select the opportunities on their career ladder; write effective emails; make telephone calls; participate in teleconferences; write and deliver presentations; take part in and chair meetings; acquire, recognize and apply business etiquette and use the business and professional terminology learnt in this part.	Objectives Upon completing Part 3 of the course, learners should be able to implement leadership; organize a foreign partner's visit; apply stress management and time management; apply project management rules; maintain customer care; take part in negotiations; communicate when on a business trip; communicate when working on-site and use the business and professional terminology learnt in this part.	Objectives Upon completing Part 4 of the course, learners should be able to analyze information; describe graphs; write documents; use financial, marketing, management terminology; conduct a SWOT analysis; read/listen to and comprehend business news; write and defend a thesis and use the business and professional terminology learnt in this part.

Table 1. *Cont.*

	Part 1 Beginner-Elementary	**Part 2 Pre-Intermediate**	**Part 3 Intermediate**	**Part 4 Upper Intermediate**	
Key activities: reading, writing, speaking, listening Motivational activities: short interactive videos; games/role-plays; jokes; case study; mobile applications	Beginner-elementary grammar module	Pre-intermediate grammar module	Intermediate grammar module	Upper intermediate grammar module	Assessment and evaluation activities: quizzes and quests; projects; reading reflections; community study; research paper.
	Key topics Introducing yourself, Small talk, CV and cover letter, Job interview, Networking, Company structure, Office management	Key topics Career ladder, Emailing, Telephoning, Teleconferencing, Presentations, Meetings, Business etiquette	Key topics Leadership, Foreign partner's visit, Stress Management, Project management, Customer care, Negotiations, Business trips, Working on-site	Key topics Analyzing information, Describing graphs, Documentation, Finances, Marketing, Management, SWOT analysis, Business news, Research papers (master's thesis)	
	Terminology Module Business terminology Technical terminology; key terms in different specialties (pronunciation, definitions, and translation)				
	Outcomes Upon completing Part 1, learners are able to introduce him/herself as a specialist; carry out a small talk; write his/her CV and a cover letter; take/give a job interview; maintain networking (exchange contact information, ask and answer questions); present a company structure (departments and jobs); and know office equipment and understand office management.	Outcomes Upon completing Part 2, learners are able to make a list of the opportunities of their career ladder; write two effective emails (formal and informal); carry out a telephone talk and a teleconference; write and deliver a presentation; take part in and chair a meeting; and acquire, recognize and apply business etiquette.	Outcomes Upon completing Part 3 of the course, learners should be able to implement leadership; organize a foreign partner's visit; apply stress management and time management; apply project management rules; maintain customer care; take part in negotiations; communicate when on a business trip; and communicate when working on-site.	Outcomes Upon completing Part 4, learners are able to analyze information; describe a graph; write documents; use financial, marketing, management terminology; conduct a SWOT analysis; and read/listen to and comprehend business news.	
	Corrective activities: re-teaching; individual tutoring; peer tutoring; cooperative teams; alternative textbooks and materials, workbooks and study guides; learning kits; learning centres				
	Business English Competence				

3.4.2. Course Content and Structure

At the design stage, the instructional designer (author) of the course needs to determine the course content and structure. We chunk the course into four parts and arrange them logically. Parts 1 to 4 include a range of independent vocabulary and conversation modules. It also makes sense to arrange a set of grammar modules adjusted to the business terminology and conversations on the key topics. The English grammar modules should be arranged in such a way that Beginner-Elementary learners will be able to join the course and learn (or refresh) grammatical skills gradually up to Upper Intermediate level. Table 1 shows the course content and structure in detail.

At the design stage, we will also need to decide on which educational platform (open online education portal) the course will be placed, and how feedback will be organized. Feedback can be provided by answering learners' questions on the platform where the course is placed, or via launching blogs and chats on social networks, webinars and online and offline conferences involving learners and teachers. However, we can hardly provide constant feedback for oral and writing activities with an online course, in which integration could help.

3.4.3. Course Learning Objectives

Motivational Design: How to Keep Learners Motivated within Integrated Learning

Now, when we have revealed important professional knowledge (see Table 1), we need to enhance advanced content knowledge. At the development stage, it is necessary to select resources and learning formats, to choose the style and manner of presentation of learning materials, and tools to enhance cognitive activity of students. For this, we need to visualize the content and make it attractive for learners by means of understandable comparison and analogy and elements of suspense. Among the pro-active methods and forms of learning we will apply are joint web projects, case studies, business games, the problem approach, learning through discoveries and more. The course will include short interactive videos (ranging from 5 to 10 min.) that students can speed up or slow down to match their preferred pace for listening. All other activities and tests should be interactive. In addition, the learners should be able to reset deadlines in accordance with their schedule, but it might be impossible in blended learning.

Motivation is a cornerstone in eLearning. Although, for K. Krechetnikov, informational technology and telecommunication themselves motivate learners [32], to shape an effective learning environment for motivational learning, instructional designers use multiple approaches. John Keller's ARCS model of motivational design consists of the four steps: attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction. To grab learners' attention, different methods can be used, such as learners' active participation in games, role-plays and hands-on practices; use of humour; a variety of media; real world examples and provocative questions. Relevance should demonstrate the importance and usefulness of the content through linking to previous experience; relevant solutions to current and future issues and examples and cases from role models and successful professionals; it should also give the learner choice. Confidence should include communicating objectives and prerequisites; challenging but doable activities; facilitating self-development; providing evaluation and feedback and learners being in control of their learning. Satisfaction (or making the overall experience positive and worthwhile for the learner) includes praise or reward, reinforcement of learned materials and opportunities for the immediate application of the acquired knowledge and skills [33].

We also offer to use learning activities such as illustrated lectures, team teaching, interviews, presentations with a Q&A session or panel discussion, conversations (dialogues), brainstorming, drama, project work, field visits (pre-recorded real situations), demonstrations (live or pre-recorded), quizzes/quests, individual/group activities (on channels for smaller groups), group discussions and mailing feedback/comments.

Edutainment and infotainment also could help. Edutainment and infotainment provide 'added value' in teaching; they expand the landscape of formal and informal education and appeal to a new nature of cognition in contemporary young and adult learners. They tend to learn better and easier when in an environment similar to their real life, where they are used to interactivity, fast-flowing chunks of information and clipped and/or fragmented information delivered in the most animated way [34]. This approach has limitations; infotainment and edutainment can augment learning only when accompanied with educational purposes to boost the outcomes of learning. An example is short interactive videos paused to challenge the learners to answer a question, do a quiz, express like/dislike of something or comment on it.

As we aim to combine the online course with offline and distance synchronous learning, let us have a look at how different learning activities could augment each other in the three learning formats (Table 2).

Formative Assessment and Course Learning Outcomes

Within the course, we want to organize formative assessment and reflection instead of competitiveness, as the learners should not be limited by the time taken to acquire the skills. We stand for formative assessment for many reasons; it makes teaching student-oriented and involves students in their own learning; it is diagnostic and remedial; it provides

effective feedback; it influences students' motivation and self-esteem; it let instructors (teachers) adjust their teaching; it considers varied learning styles and students understand the criteria that will be used to assess their coursework. However, there is a limitation; integrated with the offline course, we will have to limit acquisition time for some of the modules to adjust them to the real-time learning pace of a master's group.

Table 2. Learning activities distribution in synchronous and asynchronous online and offline learning.

Online Course	Offline Course	Distance Synchronous Learning
Watching short (interactive) videos/pre-recorded real world examples/illustrated lectures/interviews/field visits (pre-recorded real situations)/demonstrations (live or pre-recorded)		
Textbooks/workbooks/alternative textbooks/learning materials		
Games/quizzes/quests/humor (jokes)/interesting facts/memes/quotes		
Grammar and vocabulary exercises/training pronunciations (e. g. tongue twisters) including training via (mobile) apps		
Reading texts	Reading reflection	
	Role-play (drama)/business game	
Conversation simulator	Conversation (student–student dialogue)/team teaching/brainstorming individual/group activities (on channels for smaller groups)	
	Presentation (with a Q&A session or panel discussion)/mock-meeting/mock-conference	
Peer review tasks	Essays/mailing feedback/comments (with the teacher's feedback)	
Learners' chats	Discussions/provocative questions/group discussions	
	Project work/community studies/case studies/problem approaches/learning through discoveries	
	Research paper/master's thesis	
Multiple-choice tests (automatically checked)/checkboxes/text input problems/dropdown problems/numerical inputs Mid-term and final (pass/fail) exams		
Study guides/learning kits/instructor's feedback (if possible)	Re-teaching/individual tutoring/peer tutoring/cooperative teams/learning centres	

To migrate the objectives, prerequisites, (self-) assessment and evaluation tools, we need to develop a syllabus for an integrated course. Such a syllabus will provide students with a tentative programme and describe rubrics for each credit activity. One example is a rubric for assessing and evaluating an oral presentation (Table 3).

Table 3. Rubrics for assessing and evaluating an oral presentation.

Rubrics/Points	Below Expectations (1–2 Points)	Meets Expectation (3–4 Points)	Above Expectations (5 Points)
Content and structure	No/unclear structure, no argumentation, no connection between the statements, no/sporadic examples, lack of research	Clear structure but no argumentation, not all the examples are relevant	Clear structure (introduction, the main part, conclusion), strong argumentation, all the examples are relevant, evidence of sufficient research

Table 3. *Cont.*

Rubrics/Points	Below Expectations (1–2 Points)	Meets Expectation (3–4 Points)	Above Expectations (5 Points)
Visual aids and hand-outs	No/irrelevant visual aids and/or hand-outs	Visual aids and/or hand-outs are well done but contain some irrelevant information or mistakes	Visual aids and/or hand-outs are well done to support the presentation and are useful for the audience
Presenter's behavior and voice	The presenter is not interested in the subject/reads the text of the presentation too nervously/speaks too fast (or slow)/is difficult to hear/has no eye contact/has no dress code awareness	The presenter reads some parts of the presentation, fails to maintain/is afraid of eye contact and feels nervous.	The presenter is confident, has a clear voice, maintains eye contact and is aware of dress code.
Audience involvement	The presenter does not involve the audience or tries to involve the audience, but unsuccessfully.	The presenter tries to involve the audience but has some problems (e.g., nervousness/lack of proper preparation/does not know the strategies, etc.)	Presentation involves the audience by means of its clear structure and involving content, the presenter's eye contact, attractive and useful hand-outs and visual aids, etc.
Length of the presentation	Longer than 7 min.	Slightly exceeds 7 min (not more than 1–3 min)	Appropriate length (7 min. including a Q-and-A session)
Q-and-A session	The presenter fails to answer the questions.	The presenter can answer the questions, but do not feel confident and/or make mistakes.	The presenter encourages the audience to ask/is ready to answer all the questions, gives examples and performs strong argumentation.

Michael Woolcock presents six assessment items as a manageable workload for both students and instructors: short essays/book reports; research papers; oral presentations; class participation; problem sets and mid-term/final exams (in-class versus take-home). Other assessment items are also used: quizzes and competitions; projects; debates; elocution; group discussions; club activities; reading reflections; community study; research papers; conferences and presentations [35]. Thomas Guskey argues that "The power of formative classroom assessment depends on how we use the results". Among effective corrective activities, he offers re-teaching; individual tutoring; peer tutoring; cooperative teams; textbooks; alternative textbooks, materials, workbooks and study guides; academic games; learning kits; learning centres and laboratories and computer activities. It is also important to plan enrichment activities; some students will demonstrate their mastery of unit concepts and skills on the first try and will have no need for corrective activities [36]. Table 1 shows the assessment and corrective activities of our course. The formative classroom assessment approach has limitations within our design as pass/fail exams, differentiated or non-differentiated, are scheduled as mandatory by most universities. To meet this challenge, we should describe the activities we will evaluate within the offline course (or distance synchronous learning) in a syllabus, and make the students familiar with the requirements before the course starts. At the same time, we should show the students opportunities for their individual work and self-development on the online course as part of their overall performance.

At the implementation stage, we will also need to understand how technical problems will be resolved, whether the online course content will be updatable and how we will update the materials.

3.5. Outcome 5: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Course

At the stage of evaluating the effectiveness of the course, we need to make sure that the online course makes the learning process more effective. For this, we use the Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson's r). Table 4 shows the grade point average (a five-point academic grading system) of the experimental group of master's students, some of whom learned the modules of Part 1 of the online course. The students who did the modules are coded as 2 and those who did not are coded as 1.

Table 4. Grade point average of the experimental group of master's students.

Students	Students Who Did (Coded 2) and Did Not Do (Coded 1) Online Modules	Grades for the Key Skills Learned in the Modules							Grade Point Average (A Five-Point Academic Grading System)
		Introduce Yourself	CV	Job Interview	Small Talk	Company Structure	Office	Networking	
1	2	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	4.00
2	2	4	5	4	4	5	4	3	4.14
3	1	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	3.29
4	1	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	3.43
5	1	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3.14
6	2	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	4.57
7	2	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	4.57
8	2	5	5	4	3	5	4	5	4.43
9	1	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	3.57
10	2	5	5	4	5	5	4	3	4.43
11	1	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3.14
12	2	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.86
13	2	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.86

Based on these figures, Pearson's r = 0.92, which means that there is a correlation between learning the online course and the overall performance of the students. Figure 3 shows that those students who took the modules of Part 1 performed better and gained more potential for making further progress in Business English competence.

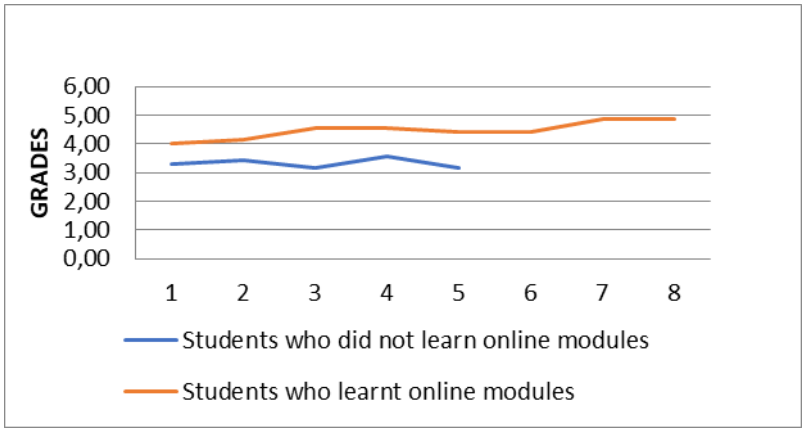


Figure 3. Correlation of the performance of the students who learnt and those who did not take the modules of Part 1 of the online course.

There is a limitation in the conducted assessment, as we only tested part of the course. However, we expect such a correlation in further testing, provided the students are aware of responsible learning and contribute to their learning outcomes.

For M. D. Merrill, learning is promoted when learners are engaged in meeting real-world challenges; their new knowledge is founded on the knowledge they had gained

before, new knowledge is demonstrated to the learner and is applied by the learner, and new knowledge is integrated into the learner's world [19]. Our course seems to meet all of these principles. Moreover, integration helps to implement so-called human touch as one of the main principles of distance learning, argued by A. Andreev way back in 1999 [37].

4. Discussion

We have verified the research hypothesis by means of multiple approaches, including the instructional design approach. The main finding is that designing an efficient targeted online course should involve blending it with the existing offline courses at a university under study before. The key practical outcome of this research is the design of an integrative Business English online course that teachers and students can efficiently use in synchronous and asynchronous online learning as well as in offline learning. This research proves that such an integration enhances developing language competence and soft skills in master's students studying English at a technical university.

Surveying the master's students majoring in different specializations at Saint Petersburg Mining University proved their high expectations for their future professional life, with many duties conducted in English, which was an unexpected finding. This integrative approach covers the gap between students' high expectation and their relatively poor skills before taking part in the course, via considering their learning habits.

We have outlined a design of an integrative Business English online course. A logical structure of the moduled course allows students with different levels of the English language to join and re-join the course, and take all the modules or choose the modules they need. As for the content, the online course combines the most essential activities expected in students' future business lives with a focus on the specifics of their profession. Such a course enables engineering master's students to gain all essential competencies that will make them highly competitive on the professional labour market. Training an experimental group showed a correlation between doing some of the modules of the course and their overall performance in English.

However, some of the approaches to designing the course have limitations: a gap between the formative assessment and the mandatory summative assessment at the end of each semester required by the university policy, a gap between our target audiences' learning habits and a risk of levelling off their learning outcomes due to excessive entertainment. Another concern is that such intensive learning might increase workload for students and English instructors.

Further research suggests the following steps: (1) design and development of the multimedia environment of the course; (2) development and perfecting of the content, and saturation of the course with multiple activities; (3) development and assessment of its interactivity; (4) making the course updatable; (5) implementation, monitoring and assessment of the course; and (6) unification of the requirements of all master's students, in case the university is interested.

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