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Scientific article

## Designing Online Educational Russian Language Courses in Finland

Ahti O. Nikunlassi, Anastasia D. Loginova,  
Georgy V. Ufimtsev, Ekaterina Y. Protassova✉

*University of Helsinki,  
P.O. Box 4, 3 Yliopistonkatu, Helsinki, 00014, Republic of Finland*  
✉ [ekaterina.protassova@helsinki.fi](mailto:ekaterina.protassova@helsinki.fi)

**Abstract.** When switching to online teaching, the question arises about the feasibility, methods and form of transposing existing teaching materials into the Internet and creating new ones. The aim of the study is to show what opportunities electronic educational environment ViLLE, developed in Finland, has for teaching Russian as a foreign language and as a second home language. The material of the article includes exercises created in this e-environment, and the methods of the research include various software and pedagogical solutions aimed at implementing the methodology. During research, starting in 2017, e-learning platform ViLLE has allowed the Russian language to find and to take its place in Finland's digital language teaching system. Different courses were created, with different sets of tasks and exercises that can be used by teachers and students of any educational institution. Some of the courses, among them those aimed at bilinguals, provide an opportunity to familiarize students with the included theoretical material. Having mastered the necessary minimum skills of using ViLLE, any teacher can independently modify tasks and exercises, combine them in the desired sequence and volume, and thus create courses adapted to the needs of their students. An integrated performance analysis system makes their work easier by allowing the teacher to focus on a specific language teaching problem. The results showed that among the existing electronic educational resources, online platforms and e-learning environments are the most essential tools for teaching a foreign/second language, since only they give the teacher the opportunity to independently plan and structure the entire educational process, manage it, use existing materials and create new ones, automatize certain functions, combine various educational events, and communicate with students. The article compares criteria for evaluating such resources and dividing them into two categories: (1) general criteria that include multi-functionality, the set of features provided by the environment, and compatibility with regard to encoding and format of training materials and other system components; (2) those considering needs of specific teachers and students and their resources, namely, resource administrating, creating tasks and courses, managing and monitoring the learning process. The future plans concern carrying out extensive monitoring of the effectiveness of the system in school and university teaching.

**Keywords:** e-learning environment, online exercises, e-platform ViLLE, teaching Russian in Finland, Finnish-Russian bilinguals, pedagogy for online resources

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## Introduction

Currently, thanks to universal computerization and internetization, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and various types of foreign language activities are included in the learning process, which both teachers and students find quite natural (Chun et al., 2016; Golonka, 2014). Due to the coronavirus pandemic, educational institutions were forced to organize distance learning (Crawford et al., 2020), which greatly contributed to the development and implementation of e-learning resources. Such resources include any resource that is specifically created to maintain computer-assisted learning (mobile phones or tablets can also be used). These resources can be divided into three categories: 1) independent educational programs, mobile applications and other software products (such as WordDive and Quizlet) that learners use to study on their own (for example, learning the vocabulary of a foreign language); 2) portals and sites like Gramota.ru, “О России по-русски” (“About Russia in Russian”, o-rossii.ru), “Образование на русском” (“Education in Russian”, pushkininstitute.ru) and PushkinOnline, which provide various educational materials, for example, dictionaries, exercises, textbooks and texts with hyperlinks, audio and video recordings, spell and punctuation checkers, consultation, tests, etc.; 3) digital educational environments, or virtual learning environments (VLE) which are used to organize the educational process (see also, for example: Guzhova, 2019; Chambers, Davies, 2001; Fotos, Brown, 2004). Teachers claim that they prefer VLE to particular sites and programs.

New technologies are often understood as means that facilitate the use of modern teaching methods. These technologies include the implementation of collective projects, the use of corpora, databases, Internet resources, online exercises and other teaching materials. It is crucial to combine linguistics with information technology and teaching tasks. In this area theory and practice are more interrelated than in other sections of pedagogy, as the quality of the educational process and the readiness of teachers and students to participate in it depend on the implementation of the developed products (Rudenko-Morgun, 2006; Chappelle, Sauro, 2017; Farr, Murray, 2016; Shadiev, Yang, 2020; Thorne, May, 2017). However, those who rely on new technologies too much will use them on a regular basis, ignoring the other ways of interaction with learners. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly assess the necessity to use electronic means (Li, 2017). However, someone may doubt that different online platforms, software repositories, sites and digital materials are really new technologies since their online format is their only difference from traditional technologies (for example, Bar-khudarova et al., 2018, Problemy i perspektivy..., 2017). Thus, experts create elec-

tronic manuals and online systems to monitor students' learning and assess their knowledge (Vyazovskaya et al., 2016). In addition, it is crucial to create specialized resources, for example, online reference dictionaries to teach students a scientific style of speech (Nikunlassi, 2012).

A number of works are devoted to independent learning. Soler Cervera conducted research to find out if university students are able to independently complete an online course on academic English writing (Soler Cervera et al., 2005). It turned out that there are learners who are able to study in a virtual classroom and do not need teachers' help to organize the learning process. Moreover, they critically evaluate resources and choose training materials, methods, and means of communication and information sources. In this case, students have to be equal and to be able to discuss different issues with other learners. At the same time, there are some passive students who do not try to find an answer or who just paraphrase the information they are given, trying to please the teacher. Analyzing the whole situation, the teacher gets an idea about students' personal qualities.

The researchers have focused on the ways of using online resources (Petrosyan, Smirnova, 2020), the principles of multimedia and flexibility (Pikalova, 2020). Gaming techniques are also effectively used in online teaching (Reinhardt, 2019). Bagicheva investigates the ways to combine gaming interactive techniques with Russian national traditions in a mobile educational game that forms speech, linguistic and communicative competencies of beginner level students (Bagicheva et al., 2019).

Kähkönen (2019) shows that when evaluating e-learning courses, it is necessary to compare their effectiveness with classroom exercises. According to the results of the experiment involving the use of the ViLLE digital environment, school students (high school graduates who are A1–B1 in Russian) like doing assignments most of all. When they were asked in which way the system could be improved, they advised to provide more lexical clues and give keys to all exercises. In addition, they said that they wanted to be able to ask teachers for explanations if they had problems doing some task. Finally, they said it would be a good idea if it was possible to change or underline something in the assignment and to listen to the task. What students liked about the system was the topic variability. Apart from that, students were able to study at any time, in any place. Both teachers and students were able to monitor students' progress. All language teachers believe (Peräsalo, 2020), that games motivate learners to study. However, there are few RFL games and Russian teachers have fewer opportunities to use gaming techniques than other language teachers. Nevertheless, learners can play games not only to improve their language skills but also for fun. As a result, it is impossible to say if the learning process can always be fun, although some attempts were made to create games for the Finnish-speaking students (Pölönen, 2018). In Finnish schools it is required to use digital methods and to constantly apply them in teaching all subjects. Today, the computer is an integrative part of the teaching process, which might become intrusive and boring for the learners.

To avoid this, it is advisable to introduce gaming technologies into various areas of education and human activity. In addition, the author claims that games help to facilitate students' learning acquisition. In Finland, where gaming industry is well-developed, teachers use gaming technologies in the educational process. Thus, in terms of teaching, this country is in an advantageous position. The age of the audience and games themselves are changing. Nowadays, games have a lasting influence on the educational process at schools (for example, boys have significantly improved their English language skills, though in the past their level of English was worse compared to the girls' level).

So, nowadays there are many online resources and every opportunity to create online exercises, however, it is crucial to create specific assignments for language learners and implement new teaching techniques.

### **Purpose**

In 2016, the departments of the Russian language of Finnish universities decided to upload grammar and vocabulary exercises to the digital platform and make them available to teachers of all educational institutions. In this regard, it was necessary to come up with the criteria by which e-learning resources could be evaluated and compared to meet the needs of users. Since the digital educational environment ViLLE, which was created by the Department of Future Technologies, University of Turku, met the criteria, it was chosen as a platform<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the effectiveness of the VLE ViLLE in teaching the Russian language and give examples of exercises. In addition, the authors of the article focused on the content and structure of the courses created within the framework of the project. We will focus on the content and structure of the courses created within the framework of the project and present some of the courses on the VLE ViLLE platform; for example, “Давай сам!” (“Do it yourself!”) aimed at Finnish-Russian bilinguals will be discussed in detail. We will also analyze the criteria for evaluating VLE, and suggest perspectives for further research. The courses and teaching methods used in them were developed by the members of the research group of the Department of Russian Language and Literature of the University of Helsinki.

### **Methods and materials**

As for the materials of the research, the authors analyzed the exercises from textbooks aimed at students who learn Russian as a foreign/native language. Further in the article, we described the assignments given to language learners. The research methods included selective digitization and a search for appropriate ways of presenting exercises. Apart from that, the authors analyzed the effectiveness of different types of exercises and studied the needs of Finnish lear-

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<sup>1</sup> For VLE ViLLE in English, refer to [oppimisanalytiikka.fi/en/ville](http://oppimisanalytiikka.fi/en/ville). The Department of Future Technologies also created the VLE for teaching mathematics ([www.eduten.com](http://www.eduten.com)).

ners and Finnish-Russian bilinguals who study the Russian language. After conducting a search experiment and analyzing the feedback from its participants, the authors created final versions of the exercises.

### Results of the first stage

It took project participants four years to digitize the existing materials and to create new products<sup>2</sup>. The course “*Taipuisa venäjä*” (“Flexible Russian”) was based on the textbook written by A. Mustajoki and M. Alestalo-Shepelenko (Mustajoki, Alestalo-Shepelenko, 2001<sup>3</sup>). The project participants digitized 140 exercises from this textbook (for intermediate and advanced learners) and uploaded them to the VLE ViLLE. The course includes three parts: “Nouns, Adjectives, Adverbs”, “Pronouns, Adverbs, Numerals” and “Verbs”. The course is designed to identify language competencies in various areas of grammar and vocabulary. Below is a description of one of the exercises from the “Verbs” section.

*Description of the task:* “Choose the correct form of the participle”:

1. _____ Linda, Kim always smiled.
2. Tolya is lying on the sofa, _____ a book.
3. _____ school, Kim immediately entered university.
4. _____ on the tram, Galina was thinking about her job.
5. _____ on Cyprus, Irina swam a lot.
6. _____ the tickets, Nina called her neighbour.
7. _____ in the park, Linda and Kim went to the cinema.
8. _____ Russian, Kim started reading Dostoevsky’s novels in Russian.
9. _____, Tolya went to school.
10. _____ opera, my neighbour always smokes.

*Type of exercise:* linguistic. Substitution drills. Students fill in the gaps with appropriate words. *Level:* intermediate. *Students learn and practice the use of perfect and imperfect verbal participles and analyze typical mistakes made by Finnish learners.*

The course “*Venäjän sanastovaikeuksia*” (“Lexical difficulties of the Russian language”) consists of 241 exercises on the use of lexemes described in the textbook by A. Nikunlassi (Nikunlassi, 1993). The textbook includes the data

<sup>2</sup> All exercises have been modified by different authors, so the article contains no specific links to these tasks.

<sup>3</sup> Later edition: Mustajoki et al., 2008.

of the corpus research, carried out on the basis of Uppsala corpus and some other corpuses popular in the early 1990s. The textbook is mainly aimed at university students who major in the Russian language and literature. The Internet course is divided into four thematic units: “Verbs”, “Nouns”, “Adjectives and Pronouns”, “Adverbs, Conjunctions, Particles and Adverbial Modifiers”. Doing these tasks and exercises, students focus on the semantic structure of words and pragmatic usage of the vocabulary. Special attention is paid to the problems the Finnish learners encounter due to the native language interference. Below is an example of such an exercise from the Section “Adverbs, Conjunctions, Particles and Adverbial Modifiers”.

*Description of the task:* “Choose the correct conjunction or adverb”:

1. _____ the weather was fine, I decided to go to walk.
2. _____ our students read a lot, their vocabulary increases.
3. She liked him, _____ he was courteous at the party.
4. I had to go by underground, _____ my car is being repaired.
5. “_____ do you ask about it again?” – “I ask about it, _____ I need to know the circumstances and facts”.
6. “_____ are smiling in such a strange way?” – “I am in high spirits, _____ it is Friday today”.
7. “_____ did you send your report on the following day?” – “I want to finish this work quickly, _____ I worked hard”.
8. “_____ didn’t you call me yesterday?” – “_____ my phone broke, I couldn’t call anybody”.
9. “_____ does your daughter very seldom go to kindergarten?” – “_____ she is often ill”.
10. “_____ does she go so far on her birthday?” – “I can’t say, _____ because she doesn’t want to talk about it.”

*Type of exercise:* linguistic. Substitution drills. Students fill in the gaps with appropriate words. *Level:* advanced. *Students learn and practice the use of adverbs and conjunctions such as “because”, “as”, “since”. Learners analyze typical mistakes in speaking and writing.*

Two courses for freshmen and sophomores were created on the basis of the course described above. Students who learn the material on their own can refer to the texts in Finnish that are attached to each exercise. These texts include theoretical information and word usage examples analyzed in the practical part. The authors of the article analyzed the course “Venäjän sanastoharjoitukset I:

miten sanat eroavat toisistaan?” (“Exercises on the vocabulary of the Russian language I: how do words differ from each other?”). 78 exercises are divided into three sections: “Verbs,” “Nouns” and “Other parts of speech”. The sentence-building exercises are based on the Newspaper subcorpus of the Russian National Corpus and the RuSkELL corpus. Below is a description of the exercise from the Unit “Other parts of speech”.

*Description of the task:* “Complete the sentences using the adjective ‘целый’/ ‘whole’ or the pronoun ‘весь’/ ‘all’ ”:

1. I was so hungry I could eat a _____ calf.
2. Two years later, _____ family moved to Chelyabinsk.
3. The mobile provider launched a new tariff with minute tariffication, where a part of minute is priced as a _____ minute.
4. The hairdresser said that I should put the conditioner not on _____ hair, but only on the ends of hair.
5. He ate the _____ bowl of porridge, some bread and seemed to be hungry.
6. Sometimes a Sunday best cost as much as _____ palace.
7. We need to get to the first carriage and stop _____ train.
8. During _____ last year we made only about 80 similar decisions.
9. During the Olympiad, the _____ country is sitting in front of TV and worrying.
10. _____ Lower House of the Parliament took part in the session.

*Type of exercise:* linguistic. Students fill in the gaps with appropriate words. They read a sentence and type a word in the correct form. *Level:* advanced. *Students learn and practice the use of the words ‘целый’/ ‘whole’ and ‘весь’/ ‘all’ in different contexts. Learners analyze typical mistakes in speaking and writing.*

One of the courses popular with many language learners is “Venäjän abikurs-si” (“Russian language course for applicants”). This course mainly includes the tasks that school leavers have to do when they take their high school graduation exam on the Russian language and when they take their entrance exams on the Russian language to enter the University of Helsinki. Some of the assignments are based on the texts from the Russian National Corpus and the Integrum data-

base. All 55 vocabulary and grammar exercises are aimed at applicants who make a decision to major in the Russian language and literature. According to the working group, students taking this course find it easier to prepare for the entrance exams since applicants can look through the previous year test tasks and try to do them. Thus, they get an idea of the level of the applicants' language competence. Below is a typical Reading Comprehension exercise:

*Description of the task:* “Read the text and answer the questions. Choose the sentences that best reflect the ideas expressed in the text”:

### **Doctor Powderpill is from Vilnius**

The Lithuanians think that the prototype of the personage of a famous Chukovsky's fairy-tale about a kind doctor is their fellow countryman from Vilnius.

Once a famous Russian fairy-tale writer Korney Chukovsky wrote in his memoirs about an interesting person. In 1912, Korney Ivanovich got acquainted to Zemach Shabad from Vilnius. Shabad was a doctor and a famous public person. No event in the city took place without Shabad's help.

Also, doctor Shabad treated children and poor people free of charge and maintained a homeless shelter. Its canteen daily gathered two thousand children from poor families. During the period between the two world wars Vilnius and Vilnius region belonged to Poland. At that time life of common people in the capital of Lithuania was very hard. That is why Shabad's activities were extremely important, especially for hungry children.

After his visit to Vilnius Chukovsky wrote his famous fairy-tale about a kind doctor. We do not know exactly if the writer had a prototype of the hero, but the Lithuanians are sure that he had and it was doctor Zemach Shabad.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>1. What does the author say about Shabad in the beginning of the text?</b>				
He was interested only in the profession of a doctor.				
He was good at telling interesting stories.				
A lot of people in Vilnius at that time knew him.				



The units of the course devoted to topics such as “Paronyms (nouns)” and “Paronyms (adjectives)” contain exercises that help learners to distinguish the words that sound similar and the words that have a similar morphemic structure. Since paronyms have subtle semantic differences and they are used in different collocations, bilinguals encounter certain difficulties. Thus, in the task there is an explanation of the meaning of each pair of paronyms, which helps students to choose the correct option when they do the exercises.

The “Phraseology” unit contains exercises that help students to practice the use of Russian fixed expressions. Students try to figure out the meaning of phraseological units and learn to use them in the sentences.

At the moment, the “Syntax” unit contains only exercises on different types of syntactic connection of the predicate with the subject. In addition, there are several exercises on the formation of complex sentences. The unit contains multiple choice tests and open-ended tasks.

The “Spelling” unit is based on the textbook written by I.V. Kosmarskaya (Kosmarskaya, 2001). The unit contains a theoretical part that explains the spelling rules and gives examples of how to spell words. Students do the tasks and focus on specific spelling rules. Students practice spelling vowels and consonants in the roots of words. They also learn to correctly use hard and soft signs (Ь/ъ) and the negative particle НЕ (NOT) with different parts of speech, as well as to spell prefixes and participles and various allomorphs of root morphemes. Finally, they focus on spelling capital letters and multisyllabic words and on the use of hyphens.

The “Punctuation” unit is also based on the materials from the textbook written by I.V. Kosmarskaya. Students do specific exercises and learn to correctly use punctuation marks and capital letters. The VLE ViLLE includes a number of spelling tasks. For example, students read a text and if they decide that some punctuation marks are missing, they should click and select an appropriate punctuation mark from a pop-up window.

The “Orthoepy” unit includes word stress exercises. Students have to determine the parts of speech and put a word stress. Learners also need to turn singular nouns into plural nouns (for example, *сиротá* – *сирóты* / *orphan* – *orphans*). In addition, in some exercises students need to determine stressed syllables in homographs that have different lexical meaning. Finally, students have to listen to the recording, find an orthoepic mistake, type the correct version and put word stress. To create this exercise the authors of the course converted video files from the Russian National Corpus to audio files.

The two units of the course – “Synonyms (nouns)” and “Synonyms (adjectives)” – are devoted to polysemy. As for the exercises, students need to find synonyms, explain the lexical meaning of the words, focus on the synonymic row and replace a word in a sentence with a word similar in meaning. Below is a description of the exercises from the “Synonyms (nouns)” unit. Students need to find pairs of synonyms:

*Description of the task: “Find synonyms for the words”:*

Nonsense	fright
Child	Humourist
Lier	Hesitation
Joker	rubbish
Fear	Fury
Interval	fabulist
Doubt	pause
anger	baby

*Type of exercise: match synonyms from the two columns. Level: elementary. Students do the exercises from the unit and learn the synonyms.*

*Description of the task: “Find synonyms for the following words”:*

Choose the synonym to the word OFFSPRING:
Loveliness
Child
Phenomenon
wizard

*Type of exercise: a multiple-choice test. Level: intermediate. Students learn the meanings of the words and find the synonyms.*

After students make an attempt to choose the correct option, the definition of the word and its synonyms pop up on the screen, which helps students to memorize the words. In addition, learners analyze how the words are used in sentences which were taken from the Russian National Corpus and the RuSkELL corpus. For example, students learn what the Russian word *чaдo* (child) means and look through its synonyms.

As for the next type of the exercises, students are required to focus on the concept of a synonymic row and find an “extra” word. *Type of exercise: a multiple-choice test. Level: intermediate. Students do the exercise and memorize the meanings of the words; they match synonyms, apply the methods of cognitive task analysis and synthesis, and enlarge their active vocabulary.* The task description also contains the definitions of such linguistic terms as “synonymic row” and

“dominant synonym”. For example, students are required to find an extra word in the synonymic row:

Interruption
Interval
Crossing
Pause
Break

After students make an attempt to choose the correct option, a window pops up on the screen and learners can see a synonymic row and a dominant synonym. For example:

In the synonymic row where all the synonyms mean “a pause” the dominant synonym is “**break**”.

The next type of exercises is based on the audio recordings extracted from the video files of the Russian National Corpus. The audio is recorded in MP3 format and the length of the recordings is 10–20 seconds. To do the task students can listen to the audio files several times. Students practice their listening skills, try to extract the necessary information (finding the necessary synonym in the stream of speech) and write down the word in its initial form.

*Description of the task:* “Listen to the audio recording and write down the synonyms for the following words. The word you hear should be written in its “initial form”:

Find a synonym to the word “child”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “joy”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “end”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “wish”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “storm”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “nonsense”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “conflict”.	_____
Find a synonym to the word “grief”.	_____

*Type of exercise:* a listening task. *Students are required to carefully listen to the audio track, find a synonym for the word and type it in its initial form. Level:* advanced.

As soon as students complete all the exercises of the unit, they can see their score in a pop-up window.

## Discussion

When evaluating e-learning resources, teachers should remember that the creation and production of educational technologies has become a rapidly developing industry. Large companies involved in this sphere compete with each other, while the government organizations and civil projects strive to provide free and open access to electronic resources. In the USA the most popular virtual learning environments are Blackboard, Moodle, MOOC, Canvas and DesireToLearn (D2L). In Finland, as in many other countries, other virtual learning environments are widely used. In addition, Google, Microsoft and other large companies are actively developing learning technologies and educational environments.

It goes without saying that multifunctionality is one of the main criteria for evaluating e-learning resources: the more opportunities the system provides to teachers, the more opportunities they will have to implement their pedagogical concepts and methods. However, as average users claim, the use of virtual learning environments is, in fact, restricted to a few functions only. For example, teachers who use Moodle upload educational materials, collect students' homework in the form of files and share links to electronic dictionaries, reference books, databases and scientific literature. Some teachers use Moodle as a platform for communication with students. The rest of the functions are rarely used.

Since the participants of the educational process can use several systems, attempts are made to ensure the compatibility of different virtual learning environments (the encoding and teaching materials format etc.). Question and Test Interoperability specification (QTI) was designed by the IMS Consortium. Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) is a collection of specifications and standards developed for distance learning systems. Yet it is not known what the standards are going to be like, what is going to become the standard and whether different versions of the same standard will be compatible. Although QTI is a widely used standard, the Internet users still encounter compatibility problems.

Teachers should take into account the resources they have and choose a virtual learning environment in accordance with the needs of teachers and students. First of all, it is necessary to find out the advantages of the VLE and learn how the educational process can be organized (lectures, classes, assignments, tests, independent or group work, consultations, etc.). Secondly, it is advisable to find out how long it takes to learn how to work in the virtual learning environment, to create a course and its parts, to monitor the educational process, etc. In addition,

when choosing a VLE, teachers should learn the information about its technical characteristics and functions. For example, if it is impossible to use some of Unicode characters, in a virtual learning environment, it is not suitable for teaching Russian and many other languages. If tasks/tests cannot be checked automatically, or teachers cannot create checkbox tests, save assignments, exchange assignments with colleagues, or use the same assignments both for practice and exams, this VLE is not suitable for the educational process either.

There are three groups of the criteria related to the needs of teachers and students. The first group includes the criteria related to the administration of the VLE. A virtual learning environment should be free for both teachers and students and it shouldn't cost much to maintain and administer the platform. Users should have simple access to the VLE. A VLE is suitable, if teachers and students do not need to install additional applications and they can use any browser to work on the platform. It should be easy to get a username and password (in an ideal case, users can login using their personal accounts provided by the educational institutions). In a good system, teachers can work on their own without contacting the administrator. For example, they don't need permission to create a new course and to enroll students in a course – teachers just need to send them a link to the webpage and the course code.

The second group includes criteria related to the process of creating tasks. A teacher should have an opportunity to create different types of tasks which can be checked automatically after students complete them. The types of assignments teachers can create include gap-fill, multiple choice questions, embedded answers, matching pairs, arranging in order and short answers tasks. Working on the platform, teachers should have an opportunity to create and edit tasks step by step and check the functioning of the system in test mode. A VLE is suitable, if teachers do not need any technical support, if they are provided with a good guide on how to use the system and they can watch short videos to get an idea how to work on the platform.

One of the main criteria for evaluating VLE is related to the possibility of uploading the exercises and assignments to the electronic environment. To do it quickly and easily, teachers should have an opportunity to copy paste texts or their parts from txt, doc, docx, rtf, pdf documents. In addition, the platform should allow teachers to use all Unicode characters, including diacritics.

On a good VLE platform, teachers have their personal archives of assignments. They can be given to students as classroom tasks, as part of their homework or independent work, or as a test. In addition, there is also a shared archive of assignments which contains all teachers' tasks uploaded by default. A good shared archive functions as YouTube – every teacher can search for the material he/she needs and use it. In addition, they can evaluate the materials and in case they find some mistakes, they can send messages to the authors of the course materials. All teachers have the right to copy assignments, adapt them

to their needs and then use them in their courses. To use a shared archive, teachers need a good search engine. The archive can work efficiently, if tasks have descriptive names and teachers can attach any number of keywords or tags to the assignments. In a good VLE there are different forms of automatic feedback. For example, students can see both their responses and the correct answers and teachers can receive feedback from students.

The third group of criteria is related to the ways to manage and monitor the educational process. A good VLE makes it possible to structure the teaching process. For example, a lesson or a whole course can include a combination of various training activities, the sequence of which is determined by the teacher who can set a time limit for completion of an assignment or a test. Teachers can attach instructions and additional materials to any assignment (texts, images, audio and video recordings, etc.). In a good VLE, it is easy for a teacher to monitor the work of students, since the system provides the information on students' activity and progress, how long it takes them to complete the task, what they find difficult etc. If necessary, the teacher and students can use various ways of interaction, such as receiving and sending messages or classroom chats and video conferencing.

Finally, super criteria for evaluating a virtual learning environment is cognitive load, which is assessed by means of subjective ratings of mental effort and perceived task difficulty. A user-friendly interface considerably reduces cognitive load. This is mainly achieved thanks to the ergonomic design, i. e. the type, size, color and location of text and graphic elements on the screen. It is also important that a user has easy access to the necessary functions, settings and commands. Thirdly, users can find the information they need just by clicking the question mark on a tool bar. In order to reduce the cognitive load, it is also important to start using various functions of the VLE gradually. In the beginning, it is advisable to use the functions that teachers find the most useful to organize the educational process.

### **Conclusion**

After the courses were designed and included in the educational process organized on the digital platform, teachers and students could evaluate the capabilities of the system. Exercises and assignments created on the ViLLE platform are now widely used in various lecture courses, classes and applicants' individual work.

The online course “Давай сам!” (“Do it yourself!”) includes materials that students can use to learn and revise spelling rules as well as punctuation and lexical, grammatical and syntactic norms of the Russian language. The course consists entirely of automated tasks that give bilinguals a good opportunity to independently test their Russian, to improve their language competence and enlarge their vocabulary. Since the course also includes visual content and audio recor-

dings, and students are required to do many different types of exercises, they get motivated to continue learning Russian. In a separate tab, teachers can see students' results and the tasks they have already done. Analyzing the way the educational process is organized, teachers can make some attempts to improve distance courses for bilinguals. There are a lot of elementary exercises on the Internet but that's not enough for advanced learners. Half of the bilinguals who study Russian as a foreign language require a special approach.

The initial duality of teaching a second/foreign language is quite easily computerized (when students are required to find a corresponding word in another language, to match a statement with its translation, to join the two parts of a sentence, choose a correct word). However, computers cannot replace the teacher, if students have to do complicated tasks (e. g. to correctly express the ideas, using stylistic devices and a metaphorical language). That is why it is crucial to create communicative well-structured tasks and use them in the educational process to urge students to speak the language fluently with a high level of accuracy. Thus, it is not enough just to create a good system of exercises. It should be effectively used by all the participants of the educational process.

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#### **Bio notes:**

*Ahti Olavi Nikunlassi*, PhD, Adjunct Professor of the Department of Languages of the University of Helsinki. *Research interests*: morphology, syntax, grammatical semantics, lexical typology. He is the author of more than 40 publications. E-mail: ahti.nikunlassi@helsinki.fi.

*Anastasia D. Loginova*, Master of Arts, Assistant of the Department of Languages of the University of Helsinki. *Research interests*: bilingualism, electronic educational resources, informatization of education, language competencies. E-mail: anastasia.loginova@helsinki.fi.

*Georgy V. Ufimtsev*, received Diploma in Language Pedagogy, Assistant of the Department of Languages of the University of Helsinki. *Research interests*: pedagogy, linguistic and regional studies, analysis of multimodal advertising texts, the use of new teaching methods, electronic educational resources in online-learning, informatization of education, language competencies. E-mail: georgy.ufimtsev@helsinki.fi.

*Ekaterina Y. Protassova*, PhD in Philology, Dr. Habilitat in Pedagogy, Adjunct Professor of the Department of Languages of the University of Helsinki. *Research interests*: language pedagogies, child and adult bilingualism, the role of language and culture in immigrant integration, linguistic minorities. She is the author of over 600 scientific publications. E-mail: ekaterina.protassova@helsinki.fi.

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Научная статья

## **Проектирование образовательных интернет-курсов по русскому языку в Финляндии**

**А.О. Никунласси, А.Д. Логинова, Г.В. Уфимцев, Е.Ю. Протасова**✉

*Хельсинкский университет,  
Финляндская Республика, 00014, Хельсинки, Илиопистонкату, д. 3, п/я 4*  
✉ ekaterina.protassova@helsinki.fi

**Аннотация.** При переходе к онлайн-обучению возникает вопрос о целесообразности, методах, форме перевода существующих учебных материалов в Интернет и создании новых. Цель исследования – показать, какими возможностями обладает электронная образовательная

среда ViLLE, разработанная в Финляндии, для обучения русскому языку как иностранному и как второму домашнему. Материалом послужили созданные в этой среде упражнения, а методами были различные программные и педагогические решения, направленные на внедрение методики. В ходе исследования, начиная с 2017 года, ViLLE позволила русскому языку найти и занять свое место в цифровой системе преподавания языков в Финляндии. Создавались разные курсы, с разными наборами заданий и упражнений, которые могут использовать преподаватели и учащиеся любого учебного заведения. Некоторые из курсов, в том числе адресованные билингвам, дают возможность самостоятельного ознакомления с включенным в них теоретическим материалом. Овладев необходимыми минимальными навыками использования ViLLE, любой преподаватель имеет возможность самостоятельно модифицировать задания и упражнения, комбинировать их в нужной последовательности и объеме и таким образом создавать курсы, приспособленные под потребности своих учеников. Наличие интегрированной системы анализа успеваемости делает работу легче, позволяя сосредоточиться на решении конкретной языковой задачи. Анализ результатов показал, что из существующих электронных образовательных ресурсов именно обучающие платформы и среды представляют собой наиболее существенные инструменты для преподавания иностранного/второго языка, так как только они дают преподавателю возможность самостоятельно планировать и структурировать весь учебный процесс, управлять им, использовать существующие материалы и создавать новые, автоматизировать определенные функции, комбинировать различные учебные события, общаться с учениками. Критерии, по которым платформу можно оценивать и сравнивать, можно разделить на две категории: 1) общие критерии, к которым относятся многофункциональность, набор функций, которые предоставляет среда, и совместимость в отношении кодировки и формата учебных материалов и других компонентов систем; 2) потребности конкретных преподавателей и учеников и их ресурсы, администрирование платформы, создание заданий и курсов, управление учебным процессом и его мониторингом. В будущем предполагается осуществить широкий мониторинг эффективности включения системы в обучение школьников и студентов.

**Ключевые слова:** электронная образовательная среда, онлайн-упражнения, платформа ViLLE, обучение русскому языку в Финляндии, финско-русские билингвы, педагогика для онлайн-ресурсов

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