

SLOVAK AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR THE FIRST-YEAR BACHELOR STUDENTS

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Every year, more and more foreign students are enrolled at the Faculty of Manufacturing Technologies in Prešov of the Technical University in Kosice. For this reason, Slovak Language for Foreign Students was introduced as a compulsory subject in the 1st year of bachelor's study. The purpose of the paper was to emphasize the teaching of Slovak as a foreign language and thus help to overcome the problems of foreign students in studying professional subjects. The aim is to provide them with suitable tailor-made study material within the blended form of teaching. Slovak language teachers at the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities used mixed innovative methods and forms of study and tried to increase the language and communication skills of students. The paper compares the results of e-exercises and the final e-test of 140 foreign students from different study programmes in the first year of their bachelor study in the winter semester 2021. Slovak language teachers were able to identify students' strengths and weaknesses based on the results of experimental research. Elimination of the most frequent mistakes will help students to increase the level of technical Slovak language, which they can apply during the study of professional subjects and in future practice in Slovak companies. The university-wide Moodle platform was used for blended learning in teaching Slovak as a foreign language at the Faculty.

Keywords: Slovak as a foreign language; e-exercises; e-test; Moodle, terminology; manufacturing technologies.

Introduction

The Slovak language is the official language of the Slovak Republic. In the Indo-European family of languages, Slovak belongs to the Western branch of Slavic languages, together with Polish, Czech, as well as Lower and Upper Sorbian. Slovak became one of the official languages of the European Union on 1 May 2004. Slovak thus opened the gates to the world more significantly. This addresses a range of foreign applicants, especially those who want it or need to adopt it for personal, study or work reasons. The mobility of people, mainly students, is currently increasing. Interest in the Slovak language is thus growing due to the possibility of obtaining job opportunities in Slovakia or acquiring knowledge by studying at Slovak universities. I state that changes in every society are accompanied by changes in education, new concepts and approaches to teaching individual subjects, including Slovak as a foreign language. Differentiated requirements for teaching Slovak as a foreign language testify to this.

Every year, more and more students come to Slovakia to study mainly from Ukraine on the basis of an international agreement between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine. The teaching of Slovak as a foreign language resulted from the practical needs of these foreign students, with their interest in studying in Slovakia, but also with a low active knowledge of Slovak. The level of knowledge of the Slovak language by Ukrainian students is therefore different. Universities must respond appropriately to the new situation by improving teaching. Also, The Faculty of Manufacturing Technologies (FMT) in Prešov, Technical University (TU) in Košice notes the growing interest in studying from Ukrainian students. A study with a technical focus on study programmes at individual faculties shows that information and communication technologies (ICT) are very helpful in the teaching process at present. Similarly, creating a Slovak as a foreign language course is easier than ever, both technically and in terms of content, as we live in the age of ICT. However, the problem is to sometimes find a suitable textbook for foreign students of the Technical University, which would help them to overcome the initial problems in the study of specialized subjects in individual study programmes.

Literature review

What is the current situation with teaching Slovak as a foreign language? The Slovak national language is intensively researched at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Specialized workplaces have been established in Slovakia, which deal with the teaching and research of Slovak as a foreign language, such as Studia Academica Slovaca Centre - a centre for Slovak as a Foreign Language at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Interest in study and teaching materials, textbooks, exercise books, translation dictionaries, conversation guides, which are focused on the purposeful development of receptive and productive skills in accordance with the requirements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is

growing with increasing interest in Slovak (Dratva & Buznová, 2007; Kamenárová et al., 2018; Kvapil, 2018; Mešková, 2012; Ondrejovič, 2008; Pekarovičová, 2020; Sedláková et al., 2013; Uličná, 2018).

Web <https://slovake.eu/en> offer materials for self-learning of Slovak language. Students can learn Slovak online for free. Language courses at different levels – A1, A2, B1, B2 are included there. The advantage of the website is multilingualism, which has the potential to effectively satisfy the needs of those interested in Slovak. This portal contains many exercises, tests and dictionaries and is particularly useful for foreigners living in Slovakia, partners in mixed marriages, ethnic Slovaks abroad, Slovakists and Slavists, immigrants, students and tourists.

Many authors emphasize the importance of e-learning in language teaching (also Slovak as a foreign language), which is widespread and very common (Khonamri et al., 2020; Poláková & Klímová, 2021; Shumeiko & Nypadymka, 2021). Similarly, Azarova et al. (2020) state that “teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language requires a competent combination of traditional forms of learning and the possibilities of information technologies” (p. 39). I stress that blended learning (I mean a combination of face-to-face and online classes) was a good choice in teaching and learning Slovak as a foreign language at the FMT. Boelens et al. (2018) point out the fact that the implementation of blended learning in higher education is increasing, often with the aim to offer flexibility in terms of time and place to a diverse student population. They explore strategies for differentiated blended learning in their study. On the other hand, I have to agree with Stradiotova et al. (2021), that “achieving a fair evaluation in virtual space is not easy at all. Teachers also need to keep in mind that some students may use unfair methods” (p. 74). Several authors emphasize the effectiveness of language courses in the Moodle platform not only for students (Lukianenko & Vadaska, 2020; Havelková & Jančařík, 2022), but also for academic staff (Kirkova-Bogdanova, 2021).

Many Slovak universities are preparing study material for foreign students who have decided to study at their university. Kováčová Švecová and Smilley (2020) state that “the Faculty of Education at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica provided methodological assistance in securing the didactic-methodological aspect of Slovak language teaching. One of its goals was to create printed methodological material that would be helpful in the teaching” (p. 5834). On the other hand, Šarvajcová and Štrbová (2021) compared the differences in language teaching in the past and today in the Slovak republic. They emphasized the need to learn languages at every level of education.

Some universities in Slovakia have started to educate their foreign students not only in the field of general Slovak language, but they have also focused on vocabulary and conversation from their field. For example, The Faculty of Arts Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice offers the course Slovak as a Foreign Language for Medical Students to future foreign students at their faculty. They practice communication skills for a medical and dental practice in Slovak language. The similar situation is at the Faculty of Arts University of St. Cyril and Methodius of Trnava, as well as many others.

Similarly, Slovak language teachers at the FMT decided to prepare professional study material for their foreign students to support the teaching of vocational subjects in an effort to help students acquire knowledge in the professional Slovak language as much as possible. Publications Slovak to Support the Teaching of Vocational Subjects I (Gluchmanová, 2019), Slovak to Support the Teaching of Vocational Subjects II (Gluchmanová, 2020) and Slovak Language for Foreign Students (Gluchmanová, 2021) were designed to enable the development of basic communication skills necessary to better master the curriculum in vocational subjects in accordance with the requirements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The aim of the study is to find out the results of e-exercises that foreign students developed during online classes in the compulsory subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students in the winter semester 2021. The results of e-exercises will be compared with the results of the final e-test, which students developed at the end of their study in the winter semester 2021. Another partial goal was to find out what are the most frequent mistakes students make in these e-exercises and e-test. Two hypotheses can be expected: First hypothesis - students achieve better results in the final e-test compared to e-exercises during online classes. Second hypothesis - several spelling and grammatical mistakes in writing as a result of learning Slovak as a foreign language are expected. E-test and e-exercises are designed to cover all language skills. Tasks and assignments in e-exercises contain study material that was intended for study during face-to-face lessons. The e-test summarized the curriculum for the entire winter semester 2021.

Methods

Research design

To meet the stated goal of the study, Slovak language teachers decided to choose research using mixed methods. Quantitative and qualitative data were obtained from selected tasks of Slovak as a foreign language related to the preparation of foreign students for their profession (study organization, university, faculty), as

well as professional study material Economics, Market, Enterprise, Properties of Technical Materials and Technical Documentation. The analysis, evaluation of identified tasks and their feedback provided enough data that were needed to compare the results of e-exercises and e-test in the study programmes Automotive Production Technologies, Computer-Aided Manufacturing Technologies, Industrial Management, Renewable Energy Sources and Smart Technologies in Industry.

Participants

In the first year of bachelor's studies at the Faculty of Manufacturing Technologies in Prešov Technical University of Košice, 140 foreign students took part in the experiment. The research took place in the academic year 2021/2022 in the winter semester (WS) within the compulsory subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students I. The processing of assigned tasks in the e-exercises and the final e-test took place via the Moodle system, on the EnGeRu for Technicians faculty portal. The online exercises and the final test applied language competences (writing, listening & reading). Two Slovak language teachers from the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities prepared the tasks. The sources of authentic professional study texts were didactically modified professional textbooks that foreign students used to study professional subjects. Part of the individual tasks was an issue that students solved with experts in their specialized subjects in the winter semester of 2021.

Procedure

Ukrainian students at the FMT in the 1st year of bachelor's study must complete 2 hours of the Slovak language course for foreign students. Both semesters in this course end with a graded credit. In the literature review, I stated that in Slovakia there are several textbooks for teaching Slovak as a foreign language. We have also started using some publications at the FMT. However, over time, we found out that they were not sufficient for our students because, in addition to general Slovak in the introductory classes, they did not meet the professional needs and requirements imposed on students of manufacturing technologies. This was the reason for preparing different publications, which would be asked by students to help them study professional subjects, especially those from which they have lectures and seminars during the first and second semesters. Thus, Ukrainian students needed a publication that would help them clarify, explain, and add ambiguities in the study of their professional subjects. Therefore, in the winter semester, we added to the publication the knowledge that was part of the lectures and seminars in the compulsory subjects Economics, Technical Materials and Technical Documentation. These professional subjects are compulsory for students of all study programmes in the first year of bachelor's study. They belong to the general basis of the student of manufacturing technologies. This means that students have attended lectures and seminars in these professional subjects in Slovak. At the same time, they also attended Slovak language seminars, where they deepened their curriculum in these professional subjects in the form of various exercises - grammar, translation, to supplement, multiple-choice exercises, matching words and pictures or definitions, odd-one-out exercises, word rearranging exercises, word building, synonyms and antonyms exercises, etc. Slovak language teachers, in cooperation with teachers of vocational subjects, selected appropriate professional texts, which they didactically modified, supplemented with appropriate exercises, with the help of which Ukrainian students better understood the essence of the professional subject. Thus, the study material became interesting for students, as well as the procedures for working with this study material were useful for them.

The concept of Slovak language is therefore based on an innovative and modern didactic principle of blended learning. At the beginning of each semester, Ukrainian students are introduced to the Slovak as a foreign language study portfolio. They have elaborated and determined tasks for each week of the semester. Within each week, they also have information on the content of work during face-to-face and online classes which are distributed by teachers during the 13 weeks of the semester. In addition to the study material provided, the portfolio also contains links to additional independent study and work, demonstrations, and examples of better acquisition of language and communication skills in professional Slovak.

Slovak Language for Foreign Students publication includes a technical Slovak course for foreigners, bachelor's students at the FMT. Individual texts were created gradually as additional study material based on direct specific needs and respecting the real situation in teaching Slovak as a foreign language at the Faculty. It develops the basic communication skills (listening, reading, writing & speaking) needed to better master the curriculum in vocational subjects in accordance with the requirements of the CEFR for level B1. Basic knowledge of Slovak orthography and the grammatical and lexical system of the Slovak language are offered to students.

In the introductory lessons, we place emphasis on acquiring the basic communication skills needed to function successfully in an academic (university) environment, aimed at managing communication in situations related to vocational training (study organization, university, faculty), and later topics related to the application in the future profession are added. The core of the publication consists of lessons that focus on the issues of professional subjects, such as Economics, Technical Materials, Technical Documentation,

Physics, Mathematics, as well as Automotive Production. The principle of continuity and gradual complexity is observed. The publication includes audio and video recordings, which enrich the variety of teaching materials and help to improve the perception of Slovak as a learned language. It also contains clear grammar tables. E-exercises as well as the final e-tests prepared in the Moodle system are its complement. Students use them during online classes. Moodle is one of the popular educational tools that teachers use for blended learning in teaching Slovak as a foreign language at the Faculty.

The individual face-to-face lessons usually have the following structure: exercises on the topic of the lesson, which have a lexical, lexical-grammatical or communicative character; the text of the exercise is designed to develop receptive skills (listening, watching videos, reading comprehension, fast reading to find partial or specific information); exercises and activities designed to develop productive skills (speaking & writing); basic grammar with a link to a website with a more detailed explanation of the issue; terminology on the topic (basic vocabulary, technical terminology & word structure). The texts contain multimedia elements (video, audio, images) linked by hyperlinks. Additional exercises to consolidate the curriculum from each lesson diversify the work with publication. The current online publication is located on the EnGeRu for Technicians website using the university-wide Moodle platform. Slovak language teachers practice a blended way of teaching during the semester. One lesson is face-to-face and the next one is an online class. During a face-to-face lesson, students use the Slovak Language for Foreign Students publication to obtain new information. They consult the issue together with the teacher. Then they clarify grammar, do exercises together or individually. During the online class, students work individually, doing e-exercises in the Moodle system. In the winter semester, they developed e-exercises individually. They covered basic (useful) information, study and student life, the properties of technical materials, crystal lattices, economics and the market, enterprise, as well as technical product documentation. In this case, students are assigned two or more attempts for this type of e-exercises. They are not limited in time and after passing the student has the opportunity for immediate feedback. It is basically a self-education and consolidation of the curriculum, because the content of the e-exercises follows on from the taken and studied a curriculum of the face-to-face lesson. Students thus deepen their professional curriculum in e-exercises in Slovak. We see close cooperation between the professional subject and the subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students. After elaborating and sending the e-tutorial, Slovak language teachers assign students a continuous assessment from 100% -51%. At the same time, these exercises partly prepare them for the final e-test.

At the end of the winter semester, students take the final e-test. The results of them affect their final evaluation. The content of the tasks is almost identical to e-exercises. However, for many students, it seems to be more challenging than e-exercise because there is only one attempt for each student and the time is limited. The content of the final test is based on the target requirements for the knowledge and skills of a graduate of a technical university. The level of difficulty corresponds to level B1 of the CEFR. Teachers incorporate tasks and assignments into the final e-test. The content of the final test consists of the curriculum that students had to study during the winter semester – Economics, Technical Materials and Technical Documentation. They include the following parts: listening to the professional text and its understanding, professional terminology and grammar (using professional language) as well as reading and understanding the professional texts. The final e-test uses short-answer tasks, True/False tasks, completion tasks, tasks focused on the formation of technical words, multiple-choice tasks, etc. Instructions for completing tasks in e-test are formulated in Slovak. If the type of test task requires it, teachers will also present a sample solution.

Data analysis

The analysis of experimental research data for quantitative and qualitative analysis of experimental results was based mainly on statistical and mathematical methods. In addition, the teacher noticed the frequent mistakes made by the students in e-exercises as well as e-test. Data for individual tasks in e-exercises during online classes and the final e-test were evaluated in the Moodle system during the winter semester and at the end of the winter semester 2021. Results and grades of all tasks focused on general information concerning the University, Economics, Market, Enterprise, Properties of Technical Materials and Technical Documentation - were separately summarized for individual study programmes from 140 foreign students in the 1st year of bachelor's study for the winter semester 2021.

Results

All students at the Faculty of Manufacturing Technologies who complete the compulsory subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students in the 1st year of bachelor's study were included in e-exercises during the winter semester and the final e-test at the end of the course in the winter semester 2021. The experimental group of 140 students involved in e-exercises and the final e-test complete the following study programmes: Renewable Energy Sources (RES) – 6 students; Smart Technologies in Industry (STII) – 12 students;

Automotive Production Technologies (APT) – 21 students; Computer-Aided Manufacturing Technologies (CAMT) – 26 students and Industrial Management (IM) – 76 students. Depending on the focus of e-exercises and e-test, the results of students were monitored. The Faculty uses the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for evaluation.

E-exercises were divided into three groups according to individual subjects when evaluating the results. The aim of the first group was to clarify technical terminology related to economics, market, market mechanism, demand, supply, profit, economic growth, enterprise, GDP and the like through appropriate language assignments. 140 foreign students completed these kinds of e-exercises. Surprisingly, the result A was achieved by up to 75 students (53.6%), B – 22 students (15.7%), C – 8 students (5.7%), D – 4 students (2.9%), E – 15 students (10.7%) and FX – 16 students (11.4%). These results are generated in the Moodle system. The teacher has the opportunity to look at the mistakes in each completed task. Frequent mistakes in students' written speech were behind the evaluation failure. We tried to find out even the most frequent mistakes in the written speech of Ukrainian students during the e-exercises and the final e-test. These findings primarily serve as a starting point for teachers in the preparation of study material, e-exercises and e-tests in the next semester. During face-to-face lessons, the teacher points out these mistakes so that students can eliminate them in the future. Slovak uses modified Latin orthography. As some Slovak phonemes do not have their own characters, the Slovak alphabet uses diacritical marks. The palatalization of consonants is marked by a “'” symbol (d', t', ň, ľ; also used for graphemes ž, š, č, dž). In Ukrainian, palatalization is not described as such, so it often seems to be a problem for students in e-exercises as well as e-test. The importance of mastering the correct form of the sound realization of Slovak is subsequently shown in the written speech, because mistakes in the oral speech are often transferred to the written work of students.

The aim of the second group of e-exercises was to demonstrate technical materials from the viewpoint of manufacturing engineering. Exercises were focused on descriptions and division of technical materials, definitions of similar words “liatina” (cast iron) and “zliatina” (alloy) and their explanation using current online Slovak dictionaries, internal structure and properties of technical materials, reading and understanding of the professional text on crystal lattices, etc. 136 foreign students took part in the evaluation, 4 were absent. The results for e-exercises were as follows: A – 45 students (33.1%), B – 23 students (16.9%), C – 15 students (11.0%), D – 36 students (26.5%), E – 10 students (7.4%) and FX – 7 students (5.1%). We have found that many students theoretically already know the grammar rules, but they forget to apply them practically in writing. The most problematic ones are mastering the correct use of quantity and accent in Slovak, the use of diphthongs, the use of only one phoneme / i / in Slovak, or correct consonant palatalisation. They used adjectives (adj.) to a greater extent in describing the properties of technical materials. Those in Slovak differ from adverbs (adv.) in quantity. This usually made it difficult for students to distinguish, for example, dobré (adj.) and dobre (adv.), kryštalický (adj.) and kryštalicky (adv.), etc.

The third group consisted of e-exercises focused on technical documentation, types of technical standards, Slovak technical standards, their use and binding, as well as geometric bodies. 138 students participated in e-exercises. The two apologized. The results: A – 35 students (25.4%), B – 26 students (18.8%), C – 24 students (17.4%), D – 31 students (22.5%), E – 22 students (15.9%), FX – 0 students. In the technical documentation, students must be able to write correct numbers and decimal numbers. The problem for many was the written form of the Slovak ô and ä, for example, 5 – päť, 8. – ôsmy, 20 – dvadsať, the spelling ä as a, is rare, e.g. *napat(i)e*. In this area, less common mistakes included writing soft d', t', ň, ľ in words of foreign origin, e.g. *fi[P]m, popu[P]arny, komu[ň]ikacia, faku[P]ta* and the like.

The total results of the final e-test in the winter semester 2021 in the subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students, but also the results within the individual study programmes are shown in Table 1.

The results are average with some shortcomings. Again, surprisingly, compared to e-exercises, where there were relatively more A ratings, in the final e-test there were only 3 A-grades (2.1%). The next results: B – 30 students (21.4%), C – 42 students (30.0%), D – 22 students (15.7%), E – 31 students (22.2%), FX – 12 students (8.6%). Given that more students received an A grade in e-exercises, we expected it to be the same in the e-test. Within the study programmes, the best results were in CAMT study programme. It turns out that mastering the work with ICT also affects the results of the e-test. Students were more flexible and more responsive in processing tasks. Table 1 and the evaluation data in e-exercises show that the students managed the e-exercises better than the e-test. It was easier, less demanding for them, as evidenced by the higher number of mainly A ratings compared to the final e-test. However, it should be borne in mind that e-exercises were not limited in time, had an unlimited number of attempts and feedback was available to them, so if they had few points in the first attempt, they could start a new attempt. They thus learned from their mistakes when they repeated it. At the same time, feedback was helpful in getting a better rating. The first hypothesis that e-exercises will help students to better manage topics and thus achieve better results in the

final e-test has not been confirmed. It turns out that the reason was the different conditions for completing the tasks and perhaps the unfair approach of students in writing e-exercises.

Table 1. Total results of e-test in winter semester 2021

	RES	STiH	APT	CAMT	IM	Total-grades
A (100%-91%)	0	0	0	1	2	3
B (90%-81%)	3	2	2	9	14	30
C (80%-71%)	1	4	6	10	21	42
D (70%-61%)	1	2	4	2	13	22
E (60%-51%)	0	3	7	3	18	31
FX (50%-0%)	1	1	2	0	8	12
Total number of students	6	12	21	25	76	140

However, the second hypothesis was confirmed that several spelling and grammatical mistakes in writing as a result of learning Slovak as a foreign language will be expected (Table 2). This prevented students from achieving better results in the final test. They knew how to process individual tasks better and faster. It is one of the important findings that affects each individual.

Table 2. Example of students' common mistakes in e-exercises

Posteľ je (ja) môj	✗ Posteľ je (ja) moja	✓	Lampa je (Zuzana) Zuzaný	✗ Lampa je (Zuzana) Zuzanina	✓
Počítač je (on) Eho	✗ Počítač je (on) jeho	✓	Kniha je (Róbert) Róbertá	✗ Kniha je (Róbert) Róbertova	✓
Tie sa v procese výroby (meniť) menite	✗ na služby.		Na uspokojovanie potrieb človeka (byť) ste	✗ k dispozícii limitované zdroje.	
Tie sa v procese výroby (meniť) menia	✓ na služby.		Na uspokojovanie potrieb človeka (byť) sú	✓ k dispozícii limitované zdroje.	
Výrobok (mat) ma	✗ hmotnú podobu.		K základným ekonomickým kategóriám (patrit) partia	✗ výrobky a služby.	
Výrobok (mat) má	✓ hmotnú podobu.		K základným ekonomickým kategóriám (patrit) patria	✓ výrobky a služby.	

Teachers had the opportunity to track the most frequent mistakes in Moodle. These mistakes will alert students when processing assignments in the summer semester. Frequent mistakes will help teachers in the preparation of study material in the summer semester. Students will have to learn lessons from the created portfolio of spelling shortcomings. The source of mistakes for almost all those interested in Slovak is the existence of long vocals, diphthongs, syllable sonatas r, f, l, í. Ukrainian does not have long vocals. In Slovak, their important function is the ability to distinguish the meanings of words. Compared to Slovak, Ukrainian has a less extensive vocal system. In Slovak language is the length of vowels by an acute accent (á, é, í, ý, ó, ú). Vowels are not subject to reduction. They are pronounced in full form in each position. Under the influence of an accent (the accented syllable is indicated by a bold), students often extend short vocals, e.g. *na Ukrajíne, pracovať*. In addition to simple vowels and consonants, so-called i-diphthongs (ia, ie, iu) and one u- diphthong (uo, graphically **ô**) occur in the Slovak language. Ukrainian students replace diphthongs with short monophthongs, e.g. *beriem – berem, môžeš – možeš, nie – ne*; or replace semi-vowel from diphthongs with consonants *j* or *v*, e.g. *viem – vjem, mriežka – mrježka, o deviatej – o devjatej, dôležité – dvoležite*; or insert *j* among the components of diphthongs, e.g. *priateľ – prijateľ, bývanie v internáte – byvanije v internate*. In standard Slovak, the accent is on the first syllable of the word and is permanent (not movable). The accent in Ukrainian is free and mobile. Due to its absence in the mother tongue of Ukrainian students, the problem of acquiring quantity appears to be a very demanding, "unnatural" and permanent task.

Discussion

The experimental group of 140 foreign students in the 1st year of bachelor's study at the Faculty of Manufacturing Technologies was a sample of the research in the winter semester of 2021. They were from different study programmes: the largest group of 76 Industrial Management students, 26 Computer-Aided Manufacturing Technologies students; 21 Automotive Production Technologies students, 12 Smart Technologies in Industry students and the smallest group of 6 Renewable Energy Sources students. Slovak Language for Foreign Students is a compulsory subject in the 1st year of study for all Ukrainian students. They were included in e-exercises during online classes as well as the final e-test at the end of the course.

The topics of the exercises and the final test included study material with a focus on Economy, Technical Material as well as Technical Documentation.

Within the methodology of Slovak as a foreign language, we specified the concept, content of the curriculum and the selection of learning forms and methods. The methodology dealt with the creation of teaching materials for the differentiated language training needs of foreign students at the FMT using new forms and environments, such as the Internet and blended learning. In connection with new forms and methods of teaching and the introduction of information technologies into language teaching at the FMT, we have started to apply the already created EnGeRu portal for teaching foreign languages also in the teaching of Slovak as a foreign language. Modern media and the many possibilities of the Internet are also helpful. We have also created the concept of teaching Slovak as a foreign language, which fulfils an informational, educational and promotional function. Poláková & Klímová (2021) state that students can also be interested in Slovak in this way and thus enable mutual communication between the teacher and other course participants even during quarantines and lockdowns. Foreign students have no problem joining a Slovak language lesson from Ukraine as well. The biggest benefit of the Moodle system lies in the offer to develop students' communication skills, as well as the possibility of controlling the outputs in e-exercises in the form of feedback. The educational program via the Internet has become a modern alternative to the didactic manual for the needs of Slovak as a foreign language and the faculty EnGeRu portal is an effective tool for foreign students in creating and developing contact with the Slovak language.

The aim of the subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students is to make Slovak accessible to the largest possible number of foreign students at the FMT also in the form of blended learning, i.e. to offer special topics with the possibility of feedback. The course is focused on the acquisition of basic communication strategies, but also monitors the expansion of knowledge in new professional topics. It allows the student to choose an individual pace, supports the learner's autonomy and at the same time deepens his responsibility for the progress in learning. During online classes, students have the opportunity to test their curriculum through appropriately designed e-exercises with multiple tasks. The teacher selects adequate topics and language phenomena, helps to overcome the initial difficulties and tries to lead students to active learning and acquiring communicative competence as well as consciously overcoming communication barriers. The right forms of study have the potential to increase the positive motivation for learning Slovak. Adherence to the main didactic principles – adequacy, clarity, sequence and expertise in mediating Slovak to foreign students is very important. The independent student work that the teacher prepares for students in the Moodle system is also important in their individual work. Similarly, Kotlovskiy et al. (2020) show that a language portfolio is an effective tool that is used in students' independent work.

I note that at the beginning of their stay in Slovakia, Ukrainian students, outside of school, mostly moved in homogeneous Ukrainian groups. Thus, students began to learn a genetically related language. In the teaching process, we motivate students by pointing out the similarities with their mother tongue, in our case Ukrainian. This contributes to the faster acquisition of communication skills and overcoming the barrier in working with a foreign language. During their studies in Slovakia, students have a great advantage in studying the Slovak language, because they can learn the language in an environment that forces them to communicate not only at the Faculty but also outside it - on the street, in the city, in a store, in a company, etc. They can watch Slovak television, listen to Slovak songs, read Slovak newspapers, magazines, books and professional literature. More communicative types of students acquire certain language skills outside the Faculty and language teaching, which is a certain advantage for them. Although they have a richer vocabulary, they do not yet know the grammar rules. All this was reflected in the online classes in e-exercises and at the end of the winter semester of 2021 in the final test. E-exercises were intended to prepare students for the final test, in which teachers expected better results. The hypothesis was not confirmed here. Students did not achieve better results in the final e-test compared to e-exercises during online classes. However, the results of the research confirmed the second hypothesis. Several spelling and grammatical mistakes in writing as a result of learning Slovak as a foreign language were expected. The absence of language teaching makes language habits difficult to eliminate. This was also one of the reasons for preparing a language publication for foreign students of manufacturing technologies at the FMT, which would eliminate their frequent mistakes.

Education in the Slovak language, especially for foreign students who are not native-speaking, aims to prepare qualified graduates to practice their profession in the field of manufacturing technologies. Otherwise, they may have difficulties in their professional life in terms of knowledge of a professional Slovak language. A similar dilemma was addressed by Bozdoğan and Kasap (2019), which concerned the acquisition of communication competencies and written skills in future engineers. Many authors provide valuable information on how foreign students perceive online education. Chugai and Pawar (2021) state “the findings

of the research show that despite understanding the necessity of studying online, some students are reluctant to accept it fully” (p. 7). My own experience with teaching foreign languages at the FMT is also an inspiration for me in teaching Slovak as a foreign language. By applying blended learning, students also have space for self-study. E-exercises within the Moodle system are a suitable complement to their face-to-face lessons. This teaching model has proved successful not only in our case, but it is also documented by the findings of other authors. Blended learning serves as a means for self-study and doing homework, for preparing practical lessons more effectively as well as for simplifying and improving the quality of students’ training in education (Isayeva et al., 2021; Magos & Georgopapadakou, 2021). Students’ attitudes to blended learning are positive. They have their own workspace and online class facilities, a compelling internet connection, so they can be ready for independent work during online classes. But there are some students who are more comfortable with face-to-face study. However, I suppose that blended education develops the self-realization and self-discipline of many students.

Conclusions

Interest in Slovak as a foreign language is growing from year to year. Teachers of Slovak as a foreign language face difficult tasks: to motivate foreign students to learn the Slovak national language, to focus on a communicative approach to teaching the Slovak language as a foreign language, innovate study programmes, prepare high-quality printed or digitized study materials.

Slovak language teachers at the Department of Natural Sciences & Humanities are trying to apply new technologies, methods and forms in language teaching. They developed the concept of teaching Slovak as a foreign language by implementing the CEFR as well as the didactics of Slovak as a foreign language, applied the model of improving Slovak in the teaching of professional subjects, presented a variety of practices, techniques and strategies aimed at developing receptive and productive speech skills as well as linguistic and intercultural competences. They actively use the Moodle platform, where assignments for students of the compulsory subject Slovak language for foreign students are located. They have thus included a suitable complement to classical teaching in the teaching process, thus supporting innovative modern theories of pedagogy and developing activity, cooperation and self-reflection. They have made available a new e-course in Slovak as a foreign language, where there are 30 e-exercises placed on the EnGeRu website using the university-wide Moodle platform.

Professional study material focused mainly on the issues of professional subjects, such as Economics, Technical Materials, Technical Documentation, Automotive Production, Physics and Mathematics (Vagaská, 2021) are the content of the e-course in Slovak as a foreign language. The created and made available professional study materials and e-courses are literally tailor-made, thus taking into account the specifics of the students’ study programmes. The results of teachers’ work are applied by foreign bachelor students at the Faculty of Manufacturing Technologies within the subject Slovak Language for Foreign Students in the pedagogical process.

I propose to continue experimental research in the summer semester of 2022 due to the diverse results of students in e-exercises and e-test. There was an unconfirmed first hypothesis, that students will achieve better results in the final e-test compared to e-exercises during online classes as well as a confirmed second hypothesis, that several spelling and grammatical mistakes in writing as a result of learning Slovak as a foreign language will be expected. I assume that other factors also played a role in the mixed evaluation results in e-exercises and e-tests: the first year of stay at a foreign university away from home, new foreign environment, language barrier, pandemic situation, new virtual environment during studies, weaker ICT skills, many professional subjects, technical terminology, etc. For this reason, in order to obtain more objective evaluation results, I propose to monitor the results of e-exercises and the final test at the end of the academic year in the summer semester of 2022. It could be interesting to compare the results in the winter and summer semesters. One of the reasons is the fact that the conditions and rules of study in the summer semester are clear to all students involved in the experimental research.

Technical universities should not neglect language training at present, but they should understand it as part of higher education, because the professional help of a teacher is really necessary for the acquisition of a professional language. At present, universities are no longer satisfied with the classical way of teaching. They need to respond to changes in technology and, above all, to the changing behaviours and needs of their students. Communication skills should be properly structured, delivered in precise professional language and scientific style with effective support for audiovisual technology. Digitization is something you cannot run from. Thus, the success of language teaching also depends on whether it can be at the forefront of innovation, flexibly identify trends and link them to students’ needs.

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