



## **STRUCTURAL PECULIARITIES OF VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS USED IN EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The article is devoted to structural characteristics of virtual learning environments, explaining and analyzing each component separately and as a whole. Attention is as well given to describing virtual learning environments in technical terms, and in terms of teaching foreign languages, specifically in higher educational institutions. Various examples of VLEs are provided and analyzed for the purpose of looking closer at the phenomenon so widely used currently in education systems throughout the world.

**Keywords:** Virtual learning environment (VLE), platforms, network, graphic design, interface, user-friendly interface, Moodle, Blackboard, Canvas, MOOCs, online learning, distant education, virtual reality (VR)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Virtual learning environments are complex and at the same time user-friendly technological tools that have come to use in education not so long ago, and gained popularity vastly all over the world.

When we look at advantages of virtual learning environments, several studies and action researches conducted by Kim et al. (2012), Lin and Lan (2015), Lewin et al. (2011), Wastiau (2010), with his study on virtual learning platforms, Weller (2007), and among Uzbek scientists Rakhmonov A.B., Khushvaktov T.S., Khaytullaeva N.S., Ismailov A.F. have shown evidence that VLEs support best mostly productive skills, i.e. writing and speaking specifically speaking for teaching and learning foreign languages. Thus, our focus being enhancing students' spoken interaction, there is no better place for them to speak openly, interact freely in their own comfort zones and achieve the desired levels of proficiency in the target language.

Therefore, it is fair to say that VLEs can provide students with enough interaction so that they can level up and meet the foreign language standards of their higher educational institutions.

There are various types of environments in the methodological literature, belonging to different subject areas. They were developed for a different contingent of students (native and foreign students, school attendants and students of universities and secondary vocational schools).

The virtual learning environment is based on three components, as illustrated in the diagram below. (Figure 1)

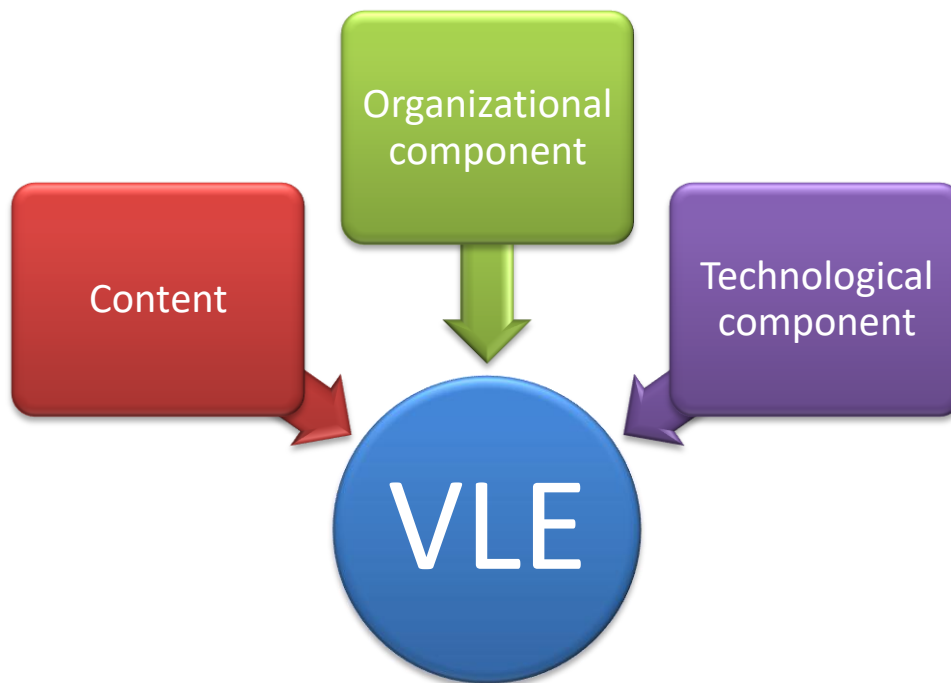


Figure 1. Components of a VLE. (Created by the author)

Each component included in the figure is explained below.

1. **Content component.** It's organized, information and educational content of the environment, including various electronic and printed publications, dictionaries.

2. **Organizational component.** Planning, organizing and conducting training using various methods and forms of training, applicable to distance learning.

3. **The technological component.** This includes software that has been specially designed to create a virtual language environment.

Each of the components presented above performs its own function and represents a certain structure consisting of information blocks.

Such environments are created at the school level, at the university level, and for a wide range of subjects, and not for any particular discipline.



There are many programs designed to create a virtual learning environment, however, research carried out by specialists in this field has shown that not all programs allow you to create a virtual learning environment for the full organization of distance learning a foreign language. This is due to a number of reasons [10].

First, a ***non-specialized learning environment*** can be implemented only with the help of software tools, and software and pedagogical technologies are included as the main components in the virtual learning environment. Unfortunately, the authors of software tools do not always pay attention to this feature, which subsequently leads to the limitation of some educational tasks that methodologists and developers set themselves or to a change in the content of the virtual learning environment.

Secondly, creating a virtual learning environment, you need to take into account the specific features of the subject "foreign language" - focus on the practical application and teaching of communication, when the basis of training is not the acquisition of any specific knowledge, but the development of several communicative competencies that are necessary for the competent use of a foreign language. language in different spheres and situations of communication. Thirdly, it is necessary to ensure the full functioning of six types of interactivity: student - student, student - teacher, student - content, teacher - content, teacher - teacher, content - content, which are very necessary when teaching a foreign language.

A set of necessary components included in the content of virtual learning environment, should contain the following blocks [10]: information, communication, educational, results, assessment, teacher's block, methodology, and tools block. (Figure 2)

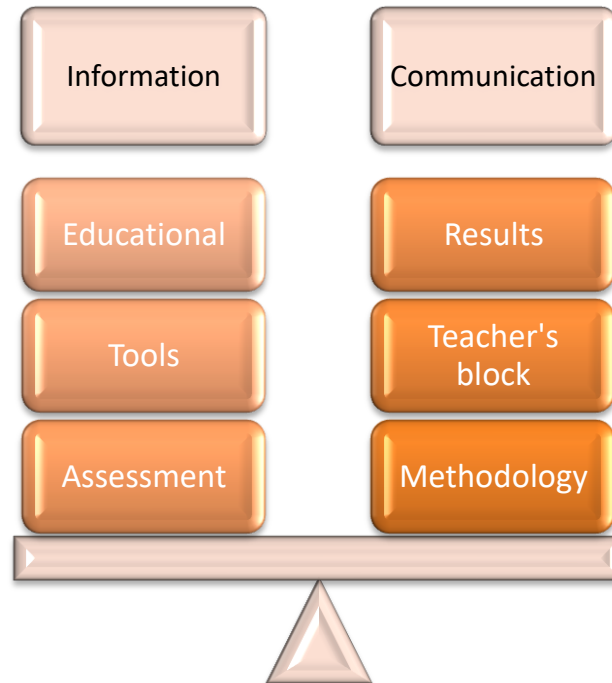


Figure 2. Blocks comprising a virtual learning environment. (Created by the author)

The component composition of the virtual learning environment is constant, but the **elemental composition may vary depending on the learning goals**, on the use of various means.

The variability of the content of the virtual learning environment is determined not only by the methods of its implementation, but also by the technical capabilities of the software that was used to create it.

Analysis of the methodological literature by Kim et al. (2012), Lin and Lan (2015), Lewin et al. (2011), Wastiau (2010), with his study on virtual learning platforms, Weller (2007), and among Uzbek scientists Rakhmonov A.B., Khushvaktov T.S., Khaytullaeva N.S., Ismailov A.F. and many years of experience in the development of various virtual learning environments show that a virtual learning environment can be developed on the basis of an educational electronic resource.

The main goal of teaching foreign languages is the formation of a communicative competence and teaching students the practical mastery of a foreign language.

The main task of the teacher at the present time is to create conditions for the practical mastery of students in a foreign language, to choose such teaching methods that will allow students to be active, to reveal their creative abilities. The teacher must intensify the cognitive activity of students. Modern pedagogical technologies help in the implementation



of these goals: project methodology, training in cooperation, the use of new information technologies, Internet resources.

The Internet creates conditions for authentic communication with real interlocutors on current topics. However, it is only an auxiliary tool, therefore, to achieve optimal results, it is necessary to correctly implement the use of the Internet in the learning process.

When it comes to speaking, the use of the virtual learning environments in teaching this type of activity is motivated, since its purpose is to interest students through the accumulation of knowledge and experience. Students should use language in a real-life communication situation outside of class. The interactive competence of students is developed through the use of VLEs by being involved in solving various problems in teams, the successful solution of which increases their interest and self-confidence.

When teaching in a foreign language using a virtual environment, the student:

- gains new knowledge on subjects and phenomena, forms picture of the world;
- studies the system in which all the elements that are combined in functional mechanism of the language;
- learns the content of the language and becomes familiar with the culture.

From the foregoing it follows that the competent use of virtual learning environments while teaching a foreign language can [11, p.30]:

- create a foreign language environment in the lesson at any of the stages learning;
- increase the motivation of students in learning foreign languages;
- competently and fully implement the implementation of the principle clarity;
- create suitable conditions for control and programming;
- teach students a foreign language, taking into account individual capabilities of students;
- to ensure the most rapid development and formation of the skills of auditory self-control;
- carry out many types of exercises not only with one learners, but also with others, and do it at the same time;
- To maximize the ability of students to analysis and imitation, activate their internal resources.



Thus, it is vital to consider all the working components of VLEs, and analyze them in a way that suits different levels of education in a particularly different way. VLEs comprise more than visible on the surface, and it is an educator's responsibility to use it to the full. Below we will provide some practical implementations of VLEs in modern foreign language education.

### **New trends in implementing VLEs in foreign language education**

ACTFL (American association of teachers of foreign languages) has recently featured an interesting practical article on the very topic of VLEs in foreign language teaching in the column "Voice of the educator". The author Elena Spathis shared practical ideas and examples from her personal classroom teaching experience, and we would like to emphasize the ones with virtual learning environment applied in teaching foreign language speaking.

The author divides her VLE tasks, activities and assignments into interpretive, interpersonal and presentational ones, and the last two of them particularly concentrate on speaking production and interactive competence which we are currently researching.

Video conferencing tools suggested by her are Google meet and Zoom, she describes both of these tools to be "user-friendly", and it is pointed out in her article that these tools provide the opportunity to have a spontaneous conversation in the target language, which is one of the main components of interactive competence of students in foreign language standards. [5]

For presentational tasks in VLEs the author proposes digital tools such as Flipgrid, a website with a response option to videos, and Padlet, a digital discussion board, and in turn explains each tool's implementation and effectiveness. We summarized her ideas on the use of these tools in the figure below. (Figure 3)

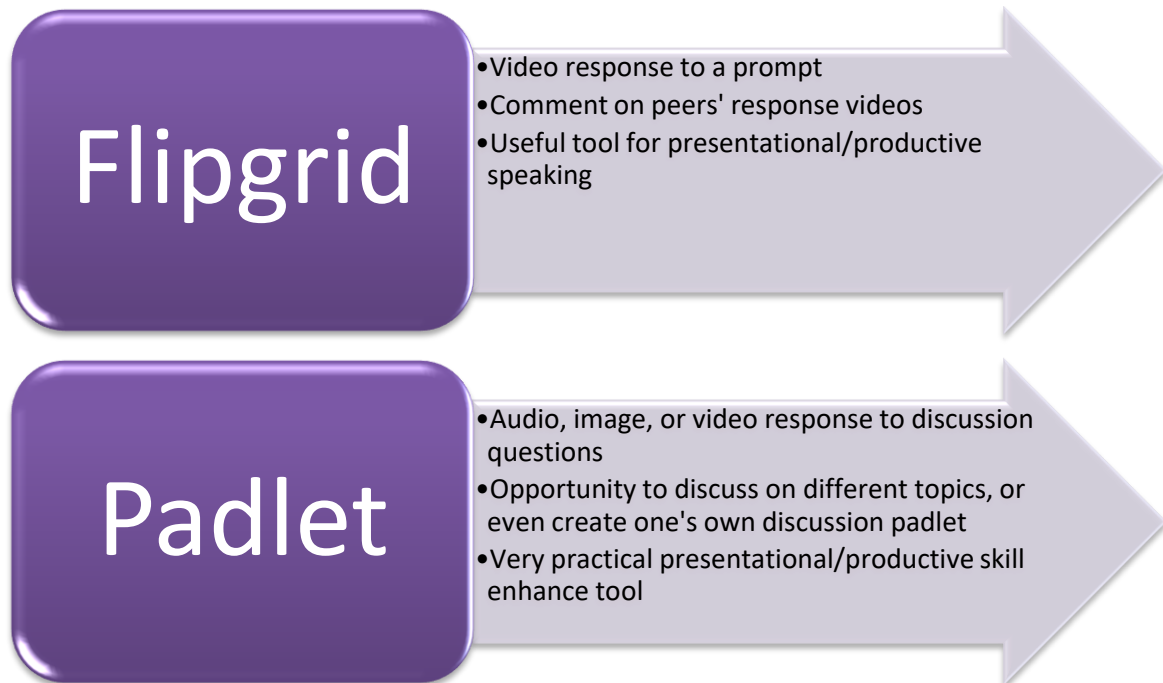


Figure 3. Presentational speaking task tools explained

### Conclusion

As we have seen, virtual learning environments may take various forms, and can be used for wide variety of purposes, starting from small supplementary courses to large scale university degree courses.

Virtual learning environments are not only internet or software tools that can be incorporated into learning and teaching, but also, as we have discussed in the article, is becoming the process of learning and teaching itself, which is a huge step towards better and high quality education, and particularly for teaching foreign languages.

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