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## VIDEO BANK AS PART OF UNIVERSITY DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Our modern life offers the increased availability of technological solutions in the field of education to complete a wide range of academic tasks. University departments all over the world are trying to find their own micro solutions to meet specific teaching needs in order to provide students with the best learning practices.

Minsk State Linguistic University is also looking for effective digital solutions in different aspects of foreign language teaching. For example, for the purposes of the university year-long curriculum course called “Socio-cultural Aspects of Communication”, designed as a practical course in spoken and written

English for the third-year students of the English Language Department, a team of members of the Chair of History and Grammar of the English Language developed a digital micro solution in the form of a video bank of materials available for downloading from the university Intranet. The video bank is not a separate course, rather it is a digital supplement to the current curriculum course, designed to activate the learners' vocabulary, develop their listening comprehension and communication skills aimed at increased fluency through meaningful exchange.

**The video bank mission.** Its mission covers three foremost objectives that the video bank is thought to achieve.

1) The first goal is to enhance effective learning process. Today we live in the 'video age' granting us many possibilities for integrating video into language learning, facilitating communicative learning skills in all aspects of education. Video offers opportunities for developing listening and speaking, which can be the most difficult skills for language learners. The videos in the bank designed for the in-class interaction activate students' prior knowledge acquired from the reading materials of the curriculum course. This prior knowledge helps students to understand the video content and motivates them to easily accomplish the lesson's activities. Videos for the out-of-classroom activities allow students to study at their own pace and when they have the time. Another point that is worth mentioning here is the fact that videos are really mighty tools to power-up language learning because they involve emotions and energy thus creating an emotionally colored classroom atmosphere which facilitates students' engagement and fosters easier memorizing of the course material. In this regard the authenticity of the content is significant since videos presented by native speakers allow to create such a classroom atmosphere.

2) The second objective of the video bank within its mission is to focus on visualized understanding of culturally specific issues – open and ethically grounded. The video bank focuses on advancing cross-cultural awareness and understanding of certain cultural issues and global tendencies in social development. It helps to build a cohesive, open-minded, and engaged community of students who understand and appreciate aspirations and values of the English speaking people. It guides students' decision-making in the fields of the problems discussed so that they can shape their own attitudes to the controversial issues of the modern world.

3) The third constituent of the video bank mission is to advance university priorities in the field of digital transformation. The university digital transformation requires a cohesive system of digital measures aimed at addressing major educational goals through a distinctive approach to higher education. The growing penetration of digital resources into university education results in the careful use of resources and saving costs, the adoption of new modes of resource creation and distribution. The video bank is a tiny part of this digital transformation that can allow the university to become more efficient and open to progress and innovation in order to maintain and build excellence, emphasize innovative student-centered learning and cross-disciplinary connection.

**The video bank structure.** The video bank consists of 1) short videos lasting for 2–5 minutes for in-classroom activities and longer videos exceeding 5 minutes for independent out-of-classroom learning and 2) electronic guides developed for students and teachers.

Several principles guided the selection of the **videos** for the bank: a) content relevance, b) intelligibility, c) modernity, d) meaningfulness, e) authenticity, and f) flexibility. In particular, the videos found on youtube.com had to be a) closely related to the topics discussed within the scope of approved curriculum course issues; b) spoken in a standard language, comprehensible, and distinctly pronounced; c) updated and reflecting modern tendencies in socio-cultural sphere; d) informative and provoking discussion, encouraging students to get involved and share opinions, leaving room for imagination; e) reflecting real situations in Great Britain, the USA, Belarus; f) suitable to a variety of learners and class sizes. Additionally, for the videos to be watched in class the principle of brevity was applied so that the video activity should not require a lengthy viewing and discussion.

The videos are supplemented by electronic students' **guides** consisting of three parts: pre-viewing, viewing and follow-up. The teachers' guides additionally include the scripts of the video texts reproduced by different speakers.

The pre-viewing part of the guides comprises an introductory task which familiarizes learners with the topic in hand and often takes the form of questions related to those raised in the video. The viewing stage presupposes watching the video and note-taking to fulfill the exercises for listening comprehension. The exercises of the viewing stage are varied and include such tasks as: mark statements as true or false, fill in the gaps, answer the questions, continue / finish the sentences, find equivalents / translate the phrases, etc. The follow-up section provides a useful evaluation of the information in the video and an active discussion of the raised problems which can be done in pairs in the form of dialogues, in groups or teams as a group discussion, or involving the whole class as a board debate. Students are encouraged to share their opinions on specific issues expressed in the video, agree or disagree with the speakers' statements mentioned in the video, compare culturally specific situation in Great Britain or the USA to the one in Belarus.

**The video bank content.** The video bank includes materials covering seven big blocks of topics that are studied during the course. They are: Languages, Mass Media, Music, Youth Culture, Environmental Issues, Social Issues, Some Aspects of British and American Cultural Life. Each block of topics is devoted to certain problems of either common human nature or those that are culturally specific. Within the scope of the first block – Languages – videos in the bank encompass such areas as: the most spoken world languages, Transatlantic English, accents, dialects, local and regional varieties of the English language, and pros and cons of the spelling reform. The Mass Media block of topics includes videos about the most popular TV shows in Britain, the Open University structure and programs,

the impact of television/screen media on children. The Music section covers videos in music history, the impact of music on people, most popular music festivals in Great Britain and the world, the Promenade concerts and the Last Night of the Proms, the British traditional folk dance called Morris dance, and some videos telling a story about a famous classical composer and a young music prodigy. Youth culture is supported by videos about the youth fashion, their identity, their relationships and stance to different media, the youth generations – Millennials, Z, Y and their values, problems of this age including pub-crawling and e-smoking. Environmental issues embrace videos about climate change, traffic pollution, rubbish recycling, the Chernobyl disaster and its consequences, and nuclear energy on the example of the nuclear power station constructed in Belarus. Videos on Social Issues touch upon family values, single parenting, teenage problems, adoption challenges, ageism, nature / nurture debate and leadership qualities. And the final block consists of videos about the British character, stereotypes, the role of the British monarchy in the modern world and the future of the British crown.

Using videos in teaching “Socio-cultural Aspects of Communication” has a considerable number of **benefits** for both learners and teachers.

1) Videos appeal to **multiple learning preferences** (e.g. visual, aural, and written) through the use of images, animation, text and audio and thus help increase learner engagement, which is extremely important in a typical mixed abilities classroom. An effective combination of the above-mentioned constituents is seen in the video “How TV Affects the Brains of Young Children”, a TED talk about the adverse impact of television on the young brain. The presenter speaks fast but uses a considerable amount of graphs, pictures, video clips, etc., thus making the content easier to grasp.

2) Videos facilitate **understanding of complex information** – using text and pictures can assist students with difficult concepts by providing an external representation of the – and help to maintain learner attention by making the information more attractive and motivating, hence making complex information easier to comprehend. As a rule, the role of visualization is paramount during the discussion of ecological issues and concepts, many of which can be too scientific for learners if presented only through text materials.

3) The use of videos supports **multimodal learning** by integrating multi-modal elements (e.g. text, audio, images, and animation) into teaching. Presenting course materials in more than one mode may help learners to realize that studying is not necessarily as hard as they feared, improve attention and encourage lower-achieving students. For instance, the video “History and Psychology of Music” comprises two parts, the first being a series of short extracts from music clips that illustrate how music evolved in different epochs and decades; even if the student cannot grasp all the details of the following mini-lecture, they will still be able and willing to discuss the first part.

4) Using videos **reduces cognitive load** – effectively developed videos or animation can enhance comprehension and retention of information. Good

examples are a short 4-minute video about Morris dancing and a slightly longer piece about the British festival “The Proms”, which serve to illustrate the concepts from the coursebook texts and help memorize them through effective visuals and a dynamic presentation of information.

5) Using videos promotes **authentic learning** by presenting information in real-world contexts, which is crucial for the university course “Socio-cultural Aspects of Communication.” Videos are indispensable to both teachers and students who are discussing accents, dialects and varieties of the English language, customs and traditions of the English-speaking countries, folk dancing, as well as many other topics of the course.

6) Finally, using videos helps strengthen **multiple core literacies** including written and oral communication, information literacy, creative thinking, inquiry and analysis, critical thinking and problem solving, digital literacy, etc. – all those skills that will ensure a smooth transition of a university student to a successful professional.

At the beginning of the course “Socio-cultural Aspects of Communication” students are required to download the whole video bank with a view of having full access to all the video materials at any time. The folder containing the video bank can be found at the computer classrooms of Minsk State Linguistic University, together with an enclosed inventory intended to facilitate the search for a certain video. The teachers’ folder, unavailable for the students, comprises a more detailed inventory indicating the length of the videos and providing a short description of the content, as well as giving a number of tips regarding whether this video could be recommended for in-classroom viewing or for out-of-classroom viewing. The latter, however, cannot be and should not be considered as a strict requirement. Another important difference between the two parts of the video bank is the fact that the teachers’ version contains electronic guides to the videos, whereas the learners’ part is offered to the students without any guides or instructions for a number of reasons, which enables a teacher to implement a variety of strategies.

As mentioned above, the bulk of the video bank is made up of **short videos** lasting for about 2–5 minutes intended for in-classroom activities, thus allowing the teacher to estimate – more or less accurately – the time necessary for one or two viewings and discussion, as well as for creating a dynamic classroom format. This rather traditional approach to working with videos is efficient for supplementing text-based discussions introducing a new angle or aspect of the topic studied and, predictably, helps to coordinate the students into moving at the same pace. With **longer videos**, the teacher may choose to send an electronic guide to the students via email and thus treat the video as homework.

The availability of a video bank shared by both teachers and students is also a way to create a more personalized learning environment and shift from teacher-focused learning to learner-focused learning via a flipped classroom approach to working with videos. **Flipped learning** here presupposes that some or all of the video content associated with the topic will be accessed by the students outside the

class so that they could consume all of the video material at home at their own pace and during class time they could complete work assignments traditionally given as homework. The approach in question has a number of advantages, one of the most obvious being the opportunity to save in-classroom time for communication activities. Also, in a traditional classroom, it may happen so that the content of a video is too difficult and most of the students will struggle with it or, alternatively, if it is too easy, then most of the students will be bored, therefore, teachers typically end up working with the mythical ‘middle of the class’. In flipped learning, students can watch home videos at their own pace; those who are familiar with the material can go through it quickly, even watching it at an increased speed, while others who are not as familiar with it can pause to take notes, re-watch it or call up other resources to help them understand a concept being explained. As noted previously, the students download the video bank without electronic guides, so some of the possible ways to flip the classroom will be to ask the learners to generate vocabulary lists of their own, write their own summaries, notes or diagrams, create their own exercises, etc. As a result, classroom activities may include pair work with students challenging one another, extended guides offered by the teacher, peer teaching in case the learners get to watch different videos, and many other activities that enhance the role of the student and nurture their ability to work independently and accept responsibility for their own learning.

Each of the major blocks of topics studied during the course “Socio-cultural Aspects of Communication” – “Languages”, “Mass Media”, “Music”, “Environmental Issues”, and “Social Issues” – concludes with a **project class** which gives the students the opportunity to co-create the course by drawing attention to particular aspects of the topic under discussion. Students’ group or solo projects may be extensions of the issues that have already been discussed in class or, conversely, be completely new issues. As a rule, the teacher only suggests a number of ideas giving the learners a freedom of choice. In a majority of cases students do not find it difficult to choose an issue to report on; however, if in doubt, the students may be asked to address the video bank for ideas. It should be noted that the video bank contains both obligatory and optional materials, so the extra videos may be recommended by the teacher as digital aid to supplement future projects which can be considered as a spin-off benefit of the digital bank.

The created video bank is, therefore, an efficient micro technological solution that meets the needs of the course “Socio-cultural Aspects of Communication” by focusing on advancing knowledge and visualized understanding of culturally specific concepts and issues, enhancing an effective learning process and emphasizing innovative student-centered learning. It serves as an important supplement to the main curriculum which promotes authentic learning and strengthens the core literacies essential for the formation of a successful, independent-thinking individual.