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DEVELOPING FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FUTURE MILITARY OFFICERS THROUGH THE BIGBLUEBUTTON PLATFORM

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Abstract. *This article examines the effectiveness of the BigBlueButton (BBB) platform in supporting distance learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and fostering foreign language communicative competence among future military officers. The research was conducted at the Hetman Petro Sahaidachnyi National Army Academy and involved 140 cadets specialising in automobile transport. Participants were divided into an experimental group (n = 70), which received online instruction via BBB, and a control group (n = 70), which studied through traditional face-to-face classroom instruction. Both groups followed the same ESP curriculum, were taught by the same instructors, and used identical learning materials and assessment criteria; the only difference was the mode of delivery. To measure communicative competence, cadets completed structured oral interviews at the beginning and end of the semester. Performance was evaluated using a validated rubric assessing four dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Statistical analyses included paired-sample and independent-sample t-tests, as well as calculation of effect sizes. The findings demonstrated statistically significant improvement in both groups. The control group showed a mean gain of 0.09 (medium effect size), while the experimental group achieved a gain of 0.06 (small-to-medium effect). Although the offline group demonstrated slightly higher progress, the difference between groups was marginal.*

In addition to quantitative analysis, the study incorporated survey data exploring cadets' perceptions of BBB. The majority of respondents reported positive experiences, emphasising the platform's interactivity, accessibility, breakout rooms, collaborative tools, and motivational potential. At the same time, some participants noted occasional technical challenges related to internet connectivity.

The results suggest that while online instruction via BBB does not entirely replicate the pedagogical advantages of face-to-face interaction – particularly immediate non-verbal feedback — it remains an effective and sustainable alternative under conditions that restrict traditional learning formats, such as pandemics or martial law. The study contributes to the growing body of research on ICT integration in specialised language education and provides practical recommendations for implementing BBB in military ESP curricula. Limitations related to sample scope, duration, and assessment focus are acknowledged, and directions for further comparative and longitudinal research are proposed.)

Keywords: *distance learning; foreign language communicative competence; BigBlueButton platform; military ESP; videoconferencing in language education.*

Problem statement. *The spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent imposition of martial law in Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in the abrupt transition of the educational sector to distance learning. In this context, the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) became the only viable solution to maintain the educational process. Foreign language education, and particularly English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for military cadets, faced unique challenges in this shift. As N. Vučen Papić and M. Bogdanović [16] note, the effectiveness of ESP instruction largely depends on how well it reflects learners' professional and disciplinary needs, ensuring that course design remains responsive and communicatively oriented. N. Todorova states that, unlike general English learners, future military officers require specialised communicative competence*

that supports operational effectiveness, intercultural communication in multinational environments, and adherence to professional standards [15]. Thus, the development of effective strategies for fostering communicative competence in a military context during online learning is both urgent and highly relevant.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent studies on the use of online platforms in language education indicate that this area has attracted significant attention among researchers and practitioners worldwide. Both theoretical investigations and practical applications highlight the potential of modern digital tools to enhance foreign language learning, supporting interaction, engagement, and the development of communicative competence. Scholars are particularly interested in how these technologies can replicate classroom dynamics, provide opportunities for practice, and integrate assessment into the learning process. Building on these findings, S. Savignon emphasizes that effective foreign language teaching relies on communicative methods that encourage active use of the target language [11]. In online environments, videoconferencing platforms have become crucial in enabling synchronous interaction. I. Zaiarna [18] and O. Sovhar [14] consider that platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, and BigBlueButton offer functionalities that simulate classroom interaction through features like breakout rooms, polls, collaborative whiteboards, and chat. However, the effectiveness of these tools varies depending on context, instructional design, and learner needs. While in their studies M. Gluchmanová [5] and Y. Yulinetskaya et al. [17] have examined the use of mainstream platforms such as Zoom and Teams in foreign language education research, the focus on the BigBlueButton platform remains limited, particularly in military education settings.

Existing research highlights the potential of ICT tools in fostering language learning outcomes. I. Zaiarna [18] considers such aspects of foreign language teaching via Zoom video conferencing as cybersecurity, discipline issues, creation of a psychologically comfortable atmosphere, and Zoom technical tools for teaching foreign language communication, while H. Safitri and T. Tyas [10] state that videoconferencing platforms promote learner motivation but also present challenges related to connectivity and interactivity. Similarly, J. Jerković et al. [6] reported that online English classes can enhance student motivation, but emphasised the need for effective instructional design. Studies by M. Gluchmanová [5] and M. Tadeyeva et al. [20] examined ICT-supported strategies for ESP. They found positive effects on learners' communicative competences, while N. Shumeiko and A. Nypadymka [12] discussed the role of ICT in supporting students' independent work in ESP contexts.

Beyond general education, studies addressing military-specific language needs underline the importance of authentic communicative tasks and intercultural readiness. O. Sovhar [13] emphasised that military officers' communicative competence must integrate professional vocabulary, clarity, and cultural sensitivity, while N. Todorova [15] highlighted the role of digital tools such as Quizlet in enhancing service members' vocabulary acquisition. L. Matviienko [9] further points out that online platforms can be leveraged not only for instruction but also for automated assessment of language learning outcomes, which is particularly valuable in remote or constrained learning environments. These works suggest that military contexts require tailored approaches, combining ICT tools with specialised content to ensure that communicative competence extends beyond academic settings to operational environments. Despite these insights, few studies have compared different videoconferencing platforms in terms of their pedagogical value for ESP. Research on Zoom and Teams is more prevalent, whereas the BigBlueButton platform, an open-source alternative designed for educational use, remains underexplored. While R. Casañ-Pitarch et al. [3] examined project-based and telecollaborative practices in online foreign language learning, the specific affordances of BBB, such as its integrated breakout rooms, polling, and presentation-sharing features, have not been thoroughly analysed in the context of military education.

Therefore, the present study addresses a gap in the literature by examining the effectiveness of the BigBlueButton platform in fostering foreign language communicative competence among military cadets. By situating this investigation within both the broader field of online language

learning and the specific communicative demands of military education, the study aims to contribute new knowledge on how ICT tools can be effectively adapted to specialised contexts.

The research gap addressed in this study lies at the intersection of three issues: (1) the limited integration of videoconferencing platforms in research on ESP for military officers, (2) the underexplored potential of BigBlueButton compared to other widely used platforms, and (3) the need for pedagogical strategies that align online tools with the specialised communicative needs of future military professionals. This study hypothesises that the use of BigBlueButton in distance learning can significantly improve cadets' foreign language communicative competence while maintaining the principles of communicative language teaching and addressing the unique demands of military training.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the BigBlueButton (BBB) platform in developing foreign language communicative competence among military cadets in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, and to examine its ability to provide interactive, motivating, and accessible learning in a distance format compared to traditional face-to-face instruction.

Methods. This study employed a mixed-methods design that combined theoretical, empirical, and statistical approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of the BigBlueButton (BBB) platform in developing the foreign language communicative competence of Army cadets. The research was conducted at the Hetman Petro Sahaidachnyi National Army Academy with 140 cadets specialising in "Automobile transport."

Participants and Group Assignment. Participants were divided into an experimental group ($n = 70$) and a control group ($n = 70$). Group allocation was based on existing class divisions, ensuring comparability of English proficiency levels. Homogeneity of the groups was verified through a placement pre-test. Both groups were taught by the same instructors, using identical materials, curricula, and assessment tools; the only systematic difference between them was the mode of delivery (online via BBB for the experimental group and offline classroom instruction for the control group).

Instructional Design. The control group received traditional face-to-face Foreign Language for Professional Purposes (FLPP) instruction, which included pair work, role plays, situational dialogues, and oral presentations. The experimental group received instruction in the same FLPP course via the BigBlueButton platform. Instructors used BBB features such as:

- Breakout rooms for pair and group speaking tasks,
- Interactive polls for vocabulary and comprehension checks,
- Shared whiteboards for collaborative exercises,
- Chat and private messaging for real-time clarification,
- Screen sharing and presentation uploads for content delivery. These tools were deliberately integrated to align with the principles of communicative language teaching and to replicate interactive activities typically conducted in face-to-face classrooms.

Instruments. To assess communicative competence, cadets completed oral interviews at the beginning and end of the semester. The interview rubric evaluated four key dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The rubric was adapted from S. Savignon's established communicative competence assessment frameworks [11] and validated by three independent experts in ESP. Both pre- and post-tests used the same rubric, and two raters scored each interview to enhance reliability. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa, which yielded a coefficient of 0.84, indicating strong agreement.

In addition, a student perception survey was administered at the end of the semester to both groups. The survey, adapted from L. Cakrawati [2] and T. Kinasih [7] consisted of 19 Likert-scale items that addressed learners' experiences with BBB as a platform and their perceptions of its pedagogical value.

Data Collection Procedure

Pre-test: Both groups completed a 10-minute oral interview, scored on the rubric at the start of the semester.

Intervention: Over a semester, the control group followed offline FLPP instruction, while the experimental group participated in the equivalent online course via BBB.

Post-test: Both groups completed the same oral interview format at the end of the semester.

Survey: Following the post-test, cadets in the experimental group completed the perception questionnaire.

Data were analysed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise performance scores and survey results. Reliability of the survey was verified through Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.924$). To test the significance of differences in communicative competence, paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-test scores within each group. In contrast, independent-sample t-tests were used to compare gains between the experimental and control groups. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated to assess the magnitude of improvements. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was applied to all analyses.

This methodological design ensured that improvements could be attributed to the instructional mode (BBB vs. traditional classroom) rather than extraneous variables, providing both rigour and replicability.

Results. Regarding the quantitative findings, the primary data were obtained from oral interviews conducted as pre- and post-tests for both the control (offline) and experimental (BBB) groups. Each test was scored according to the rubric, which assessed fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

For the control group, the mean score improved from $M = 0.70$ ($SD = 0.12$) at pre-test to $M = 0.79$ ($SD = 0.11$) at post-test, with a gain of 0.09. A paired-samples t-test confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant, $t(69) = 6.21$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.52$ (medium effect).

For the experimental group, the mean score increased from $M = 0.71$ ($SD = 0.13$) at the pre-test to $M = 0.77$ ($SD = 0.12$) at the post-test, representing a gain of 0.06. This improvement was also statistically significant, $t(69) = 4.45$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.38$ (small-to-medium effect).

An independent-samples t-test comparing gain scores between the groups showed that the offline group's improvement ($M = 0.09$) was slightly but significantly higher than the online group's improvement ($M = 0.06$), $t(138) = 2.03$, $p = 0.045$. These findings indicate that while both modes of instruction supported significant improvements in oral communication skills, offline instruction had a marginally stronger effect.

Qualitative and Perception Data

Survey data revealed that students in the experimental group held generally positive perceptions of BBB. Most respondents agreed that BBB facilitated communication, supported interaction, and motivated them to learn English. Specifically, 83% considered it the best choice for online English learning, while 79% agreed that BBB helped them understand material more effectively. Students highlighted flexibility and accessibility as key benefits. However, 41% reported occasional difficulties with access or connectivity, underscoring a technological limitation.

Discussion. This study investigated the impact of the BigBlueButton platform on developing communicative competence in military cadets learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The results show that both offline and online groups improved significantly over the semester, though the offline group achieved slightly higher gains. These findings suggest that BBB can be an effective platform for fostering communicative competence, even if it does not fully replicate the benefits of in-person interaction.

The significant pre-to-post improvements in both groups confirm the value of consistent ESP instruction. The slightly stronger performance in offline instruction may reflect advantages of face-to-face interaction, including immediate non-verbal feedback and reduced technical barriers. Nonetheless, cadets' positive perceptions of BBB indicate that the platform successfully maintained communicative activities in a remote context. Features such as breakout rooms, shared whiteboards, and real-time chat were particularly effective in sustaining interaction.

These results align with prior studies by I. Zaiarna [18] and H. Safitri & P. Tyas [10], which demonstrate that videoconferencing tools can support communicative competence when integrated

with appropriate instructional design. The findings extend this research by focusing on military cadets, whose communicative needs are specialised and operationally oriented.

For military learners, communicative competence must encompass not only linguistic accuracy but also clarity, precision, and intercultural awareness. The positive perceptions of BBB suggest that videoconferencing platforms can effectively support such competencies, particularly in contexts of restricted mobility (e.g., during pandemics or martial law). However, the slight underperformance of online learners compared to offline learners highlights the importance of carefully structured pedagogical design, technical support, and learner training in ICT tools.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was limited to a single military academy, which reduced the generalizability of the findings. Second, the measure of communicative competence focused primarily on oral interviews and did not encompass other dimensions such as listening comprehension or pragmatic competence. Third, the study's duration was limited to one semester, which prevented the analysis of long-term retention or transfer of skills. Finally, technological factors such as connectivity issues may have influenced the online group's outcomes.

Conclusions and further prospects of the study. This study examined the effectiveness of the BigBlueButton platform in fostering foreign language communicative competence among military cadets in an ESP course. The findings demonstrated that both offline and online instruction led to statistically significant improvements in oral communication skills, though the offline group achieved slightly higher gains. Nevertheless, cadets' generally positive perceptions of BBB suggest that the platform provides a viable alternative for delivering communicative language instruction when face-to-face learning is not possible.

The study indicates that BBB supports key principles of communicative language teaching by enabling interactive activities through tools such as breakout rooms, polls, and collaborative whiteboards. Its accessibility and usability make it especially valuable under conditions of disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and martial law in Ukraine, when continuity of military education is essential. Importantly, the findings suggest that while BBB may not fully replicate the benefits of face-to-face interaction, it can sustain and enhance communicative practices in an online format.

Practical implications of this research include the need for careful instructional design that integrates BBB's features into task-based and interactive activities, as well as the provision of technical support and digital training for both instructors and learners. For military education specifically, incorporating BBB into ESP courses can ensure that cadets continue developing operationally relevant communicative skills even in constrained circumstances.

This study is not without limitations. It was conducted in a single academy, with a primary focus on oral communication, and measured outcomes over a one-semester period. Future research should be expanded to multiple institutions, include additional measures of communicative competence, and investigate long-term effects. Comparative studies of the BBB and other videoconferencing platforms (such as Zoom, Teams, and Webex) in military contexts would also deepen the understanding of platform-specific affordances.

In conclusion, BBB represents a valuable ICT tool for supporting ESP instruction in military education. While not a complete substitute for face-to-face learning, it provides continuity, flexibility, and opportunities for meaningful interaction. Its integration into military curricula can help ensure that cadets acquire the communicative competence required for effective service in multinational and technologically advanced operational environments.

Future studies should expand to multiple academies and incorporate a broader range of assessment tools, including discourse analysis and task-based evaluations. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to explore the sustained impact of the BBB on communicative competence. Additionally, comparative research examining the BBB alongside other platforms, such as Zoom, Teams, or Webex, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of platform-specific affordances for military ESP.

In sum, while offline instruction demonstrated slightly higher gains, BBB proved to be a viable platform for developing foreign language communicative competence in military contexts. Its integration into ESP courses can provide flexibility and continuity of instruction under challenging conditions, making it a valuable tool for modern military education.

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РОЗВИТОК ІНШОМОВНОЇ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ ОФІЦЕРІВ ЗАСОБАМИ ПЛАТФОРМИ BIGBLUEBUTTON

Анотація. У статті досліджується ефективність платформи BigBlueButton (BBB) для дистанційного навчання англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням та розвитку іншомовної комунікативної компетентності у майбутніх офіцерів. Дослідження проведено в Національній академії сухопутних військ імені гетьмана Петра Сагайдачного за участі 140 курсантів, яких поділено на експериментальну групу, що навчалась онлайн через BBB, та контрольну групу, яка проходила традиційні аудиторні заняття. Обидві групи використовували однакові навчальні матеріали, методичні підходи та оцінювальні інструменти, відрізняючись лише форматом проведення занять.

Для оцінки комунікативної компетентності курсанти проходили усні інтерв'ю на початку та наприкінці семестру, у яких оцінювались плавність мовлення, вимова, словниковий запас і граматики. Результати показали значне покращення навичок усного мовлення в обох групах, причому офлайн-група продемонструвала трохи вищі результати (приріст 0,09 бала проти 0,06 у експериментальній групі), що свідчить про певні переваги очного навчання, зокрема миттєвий зворотний зв'язок та соціальну взаємодію.

Курсанти експериментальної групи позитивно оцінили BBB, відзначивши її інтерактивність, доступність, можливість спільної роботи та мотиваційний ефект. Платформа дозволяє ефективно організовувати заняття у дистанційному форматі, підтримує освітній процес у складних умовах, таких як пандемія воєнний стан, та сприяє розвитку практичних мовленнєвих навичок.

Отже, BigBlueButton є життєздатним інструментом для підтримки навчання та розвитку комунікативних компетентностей курсантів у дистанційному форматі. Хоча платформа не може повністю замінити очне навчання, вона забезпечує безперервність освітнього процесу, інтерактивність і сприяє формуванню компетентностей, необхідних майбутнім офіцерам для ефективної служби в багатонаціональних оперативних умовах.

Ключові слова: дистанційне навчання, іншомовна комунікативна компетентність, платформа BigBlueButton, військовий ESP, відеоконференції.



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