ABSTRACT: The use of new technologies in language teaching has a positive effect both on
the teaching process itself and on the motivation of students. Today’s students are not
satisfied with the teaching material they use in class, they need additional support and
motivation, additional engagement within their field of interest, which is the digital world.
If we offer them appropriate platforms, applications and opportunities for their
improvement outside of institutional learning (which is the basis for any further
advancement), it is possible to achieve exceptional results. The aim of the paper is to
examine students’ attitudes about the use of additional materials in Romanian as a foreign
language teaching both in Serbia and Romania, at the University of Novi Sad and the
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași. In the course of the winter semester of the
academic year 2021/2022, students used the Campster platform and the courses on it, which
were free to use. Two groups of students, one from each country, participated in the survey
of students’ attitudes.

Key words: online teaching, learning Romanian as a foreign language, Campster platform,
University of Novi Sad, Serbia, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania.
INTRODUCTION

The Campster platform was created in 2017 as a subject-agnostic, multilanguage course provider and learning management system with the goal of solving the problem of motivation in online learning. Its mission is to offer high-quality and low-cost online reskilling and upskilling options in languages other than English, and so improve learning outcomes and increase accessibility to non-formal education options in less developed countries. In order to achieve this, the platform design team had to create a scalable solution which would address those shortcomings of online education technology design (EdTech) that have made remote learning ineffective, time-consuming and expensive.

At the time Campster was founded, e-learning had garnered a reputation of a mature industry with limited potential for growth and innovation. From great expectations that MOOCs (massive open online courses) would replace face-to-face teaching, it had emerged that e-learning was ridden with many challenges such as low course audit rates, and even lower course completion rates. This is illustrated by a statistic that was widely shared at the time, and still remains relevant: out of every 100 people who enroll in a MOOC, only 12.6 go on to complete it, on average (Jordan 2015). Critics point to the fact the very massiveness of MOOCs means that not all those who register for a course aim to
even browse it, much less complete it, however, studies have shown that even when student intention is taken into account, only 22% of those who had initially intended to complete a MOOC do so (Reich 2014).

Given the current and future indispensability of education technology in helping alleviate global issues, these results pose a challenge not only for businesses, but for learners, educators and society as a whole. According to company reports, Campster has achieved success in increasing course completion rates threefold thanks to its data-driven learning algorithm which is designed around the motivation and retention of users, and which combines social interaction, gamification and advanced analytics. To improve that further, the company is currently developing its own adaptive learning system which will generate personalized learning paths for users, identify key pain points and preempt course drop-offs.

In terms of the business model, Campster operates as a b2c2b platform. Campster’s proprietary learning technology allows the company to both cost-effectively internationalize and partner with select individuals and organizations, thanks to which it can offer courses at accessible price-points and fulfill its goal of bringing digital, market, language and life skills to users from all economic and educational backgrounds. The platform launched in November 2017 in Serbia with 20 courses. Croatian was added in 2018, Bosnian in 2019, and Romanian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Indonesian in 2020, and a steady increase in course and user numbers followed. Currently, as a b2c course provider, Campster offers over 150 courses in 7 languages to more than 450,000 users who are taking courses in numerous subjects from languages, to programming, personal development, business and others. In the SaaS b2b segment, Campster’s proprietary learning management system, used by both educators and organizations for their internal and external learning and development purposes, is available in 10 languages – in addition to the languages above, also in English, Italian and French.

2. THE CAMPSTER ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Formal, face-to-face learning environments have undergone a great transformation in the last decade towards more student-centric, active, and collaborative learning models. At the same time, online education still lags due to the limitations posed by technology design. Research has shown that active and collaborative learning not only increases student retention rates, but also encourages deep learning (Deslauriers et al. 2019, Freeman et al. 2014, Prince 2004). In order to implement an active classroom, one must adopt new instruction
models and strategies, but also change the very design of the classroom, that is the space in which learning takes place. This transformation has been in the works both globally and in Serbia in the last decade and with promising results. On the other hand, online education today is dominated by the more traditional, teacher-centered instruction model in which knowledge is transferred in one direction, from teacher to students, who act as passive recipients of knowledge. Due to the convenience and cost-effectiveness of asynchronous online classes students often do not have the opportunity to engage with a teacher or their peers in any way but can do so only with a pdf or a pre-recorded video. Most users of online courses in Serbia have reported feeling isolated, unengaged, and unmotivated as a result, according to a study conducted by IPSOS (2021) on a nationally representative sample. Consequently, they need more effort to follow and understand the subject matter in an online setting, which, as we have seen, in most cases leads to high dropout rates. To turn that around, the development of the Campster online learning platform was modeled on the recent transformation of face-to-face teaching and the lesson that educators must not only adopt new instruction and learning models, but also change the very space - the learning environment, in which instruction and learning are taking place. Campster is therefore based on four key principles:

- **Learning in a community** – Learning happens through interaction (with the system, the content, the peers, and mentors) by applying the network effect,

- **Learning as a feeling of success** – The platform is designed with the goal to motivate and retain users and support them in finishing what they started.

- **Gamification** – Applicable to all subject areas, with special features for language learning.

- **Accessibility** – Scalable technology keeps prices accessible, as does offering course content in native language. Over 70% of users prefer learning in their native language as opposed to learning in English, as the IPSOS study has shown (2021).

As a result, Campster has been designed as an ecosystem within which a user can participate in multiple types of synchronous and asynchronous didactic activities and make diverse connections to different elements and participants. These activities are all linked according to predefined relations and hierarchies into one complex system, and the goal of the platform is to encourage users to spend as much time as possible using it - whether they are accessing course content, doing
quizzes or other assessments, chatting with peers as they play games, or helping others and participating in knowledge exchange. Within the Campster learning ecosystem, all these activities and many more are considered part of the user’s learning experience and all of these are designed to positively contribute to an increase in motivation and as a result, to better learning outcomes. In a similar vein, Campster courses are created according to the company’s proprietary methodology and undergo a quality check, which ensures that the content and learning experience are standardized regardless of the course author. This standardization covers key aspects of course design such as the required structure of the course, the necessary didactic elements, their order and frequency of use, as well as the style, tone and presentation of the content. Given that the main principles of course design that Campster adheres to and promises are micro-learning, engagement and interaction, the courses themselves are delivered in dynamic, bite-sized segments which include frequent gamified knowledge checks as well as peer discussions. All courses are divided into levels, which are themselves divided into steps rather than lessons, and feature a combination of media, including text, audio and video instruction, as well as interactive tools, assignments and games, all to create a dynamic learning experience that fits different learning styles.

Finally, with support from the Innovation Fund of the Republic of Serbia, Campster is currently developing the AI tutor app, an adaptive learning technology which adjusts the learning path to each individual user and identifies their strong and weak points. To develop the most effective system and differentiate between functionalities which appear attractive from those that actually support user goals, Campster is applying evidence-based decision making (see Schildkamp 2012 for an overview). As discussed above, one of the main challenges of online learning are high dropout rates. It is crucial for learning technology to support retention and lead the user towards course completion. To achieve that, the data team monitored and registered all those different moments in user experience that create friction, uncovering the two major moments when users permanently leave a course. The number one reason users never complete a course they signed up for is that they never actually start the course. This aligns with other research on the topic, as outlined by Reich and Ruiperez-Valiente (2019). The second biggest reason they give up is because the material is too easy or too difficult. The learning program needs to be just right for optimal learning results and the adaptive AI tutor app will target to rectify both issues by further improving the Campster learning experience.
3. CAMPSTER AS A SOCIAL LEARNING PLATFORM

According to Degreed and the Harvard Business Review, when employees want to learn something new 62% will turn to their professional network, 45% will ask their supervisor or mentor, and 44% will seek out the help of their colleagues. This is a positive practice which should be encouraged more, given that research has shown the significance of questioning as a learning strategy (Chin & Osborne 2008). As Graesser and Olde (2003) have demonstrated, students ask questions when there is a discrepancy in the learning process and this leads to better understanding, but also drives critical thinking and factual recall (Ennis 1993). Companies which encourage learning among their employees are more successful and students studying in supportive environments where peers feel safe to ask and exchange knowledge with each other achieve better results overall.

Campster results align with the above. In 2017, before the company was officially founded, the beta version of the Campster platform was developed in order to test the initial hypotheses on online learning environment design. Two representative groups of Serbian secondary school students took an identical 3-month program consisting of two courses: Introduction to programming (introductory level course) and Web Development (advanced level course). The first group took the courses on the Moodle platform with the help of a live instructor who was available for any questions and support. The second group took the same courses on the test version of the Campster platform which was designed to harness the network effect through gamified user interaction, and with minimal involvement of an instructor whose role was primarily that of a moderator. Their results were compared and are shown in the graphs below:
The test led to several insights, the most important of which was that when the learning process is designed to encourage social interaction, students are
transformed from passive recipients of knowledge into active participants and collaborators. Students feel “seen” and that their presence and contribution are important, which creates a form of positive peer pressure that is extremely motivating. The gamification of interaction adds an additional level of encouragement and incentive. The social factor becomes even more important in an online setting where students are alone in front of their screens.

4. RESEARCH DESCRIPTION, METHOD AND OBJECTIVES

In view of the fact that there are more and more platforms that can help us to enrich the Romanian language teaching, students have been offered more additional online resources. In accordance with their affinities, the students have chosen the platform that suits them, and the platform that stands out is definitely the Campster platform, which has courses in the Romanian language, while some of the courses are free to use. The aim of this research is to examine students’ attitudes following the transition from the classroom to the online space, as well as the use of the Campster platform during the COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia and Romania at the University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, and the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania, at the Department of Romanian as a Foreign Language, in the course of the academic year 2021/2022.

Students who participated in this research, which took place in Serbian and English language, attended classes of Romanian as a foreign language both in Serbia and Romania. Students who studied the Romanian language at the University of Novi Sad, at the Faculty of Philosophy, were originally from Serbia (mother tongue was Serbian and Hungarian), while students who studied the Romanian language as a foreign language the University of Iași were in the preparatory year for further studies and originated from the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Greece, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen.


2 Further in the text University of Iaşi.
In order to collect data, a unique questionnaire was designed\(^3\), which was translated into Serbian and English. In total, 16 students from Serbia and 22 students from Romania participated in the research. The survey was organized immediately after the end of the winter semester, and therefore it was not a pre-examination requirement for students who attended classes of Romanian language as a foreign language. Students’ participation in the survey process was voluntary and anonymous. Students could give only one answer (except for the last question), i.e. they could mark only one box as an answer. From the answers offered on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), students could choose only one answer.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1. Gender of respondents

Unequal gender distribution is present in both Serbia and Romania. The gender of respondents in Serbia was predominantly female, 14 out of 16, i.e. 87.5% were women and 12.5% were men. In Romania, the situation was different: the

\(^3\) [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hiXGJUkJuvwNvE-DlhRzUsxTAmSxZHSa6Kjy0O5PfCk/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hiXGJUkJuvwNvE-DlhRzUsxTAmSxZHSa6Kjy0O5PfCk/edit) [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hiXGJUkJuvwNvE-DlhRzUsxTAmSxZHSa6Kjy0O5PfCk/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hiXGJUkJuvwNvE-DlhRzUsxTAmSxZHSa6Kjy0O5PfCk/edit)
gender of respondents was predominantly male, where out of 22 respondents, 63.6% or 14 students were male, while 36.4% or 8 students were female.

![Chart 3. Gender of respondents](image)

### 5.2. Age of respondents

At the University of Novi Sad, the dominant age of respondents was between 21 and 24 years of age (68.75%), the age group from 16 to 20 years old was 12.5% of the sample, and the age group from 25 to 28 years old was 18.75% of the sample. At University of Iași, the dominant age of respondents was also between 21 and 24 years of age (81.8%), the age group from 25 to 28 years old was 9.1% of the sample, and age group from 29 to 32 years old was 9.1% of the sample.
5.3. *The Campster platform is useful for learning*

When asked whether the Campster platform was useful for learning, the students from the University of Novi Sad gave the following answers: 75% of them *strongly agreed*, 12.5% of them *agreed*, while 12.5% of them were *neutral/uncertain*. At the University of Iași, the results were slightly better, with 90.9% of students who *strongly agreed* that the Campster platform was useful for learning and 9.1% of them who were *neutral/uncertain*. 

![Chart 4. Age of respondents](chart.png)
5.4. The Campster platform is well organized

We were also interested in whether the platform used by the students as an additional material was well organized and transparent, students from the University of Novi Sad gave the following answers: 75% of them strongly agreed, 12.5% were neutral/uncertain, and 12.5% disagreed. At the University of Iași, the results were slightly better, with 90.9% of students who strongly agreed that the Campster platform was useful for learning, and 9.1% of them agreed.
The Campster platform is well organized

Chart 6. The Campster LMS is well organized

5.5. The Campster platform helped me learn the Romanian language additionally

When asked whether such platforms, specifically the Campster platform, could help in the language learning process, the answers were more than positive. The students from the University of Novi Sad gave the following answers: 81.25% of them strongly agreed, while 18.75% of them were neutral/uncertain. At the University of Iași, the results were almost the same, with 77.3% of students who strongly agreed that the Campster platform was useful for learning, and 13.6% of them who were neutral/uncertain, while 9.1% disagreed that the platforms helped the language learning process, the Romanian language in our case.
5.6. *The Campster platform requires knowledge of advanced computer skills*

We were also interested in students’ opinions on whether the use of the Campster platform required from students to have advanced computer skills. The students from the University of Novi Sad gave the following answers: 62.5% of them strongly disagreed with our statement, 6.25% of them disagreed, and 31.25% were neutral/uncertain. At the University of Iaşi, we got the following results: 68.2% of them strongly disagreed with our statement that the Campster required advanced computer skills, 22.7% of them were neutral/uncertain, while 9.1% of them strongly agreed.
The Campster platform requires knowledge of advanced computer skills

Chart 8. The Campster LMS platform requires knowledge of advanced computer skills

5.7. The Campster platform has interactive contents

The students said the following about the content of the Campster platform: at the University of Novi Sad, 87.5% of students strongly agreed with our statement, while 12.5% disagreed. At the University of Iași, we got the following results: 63.6% strongly agreed with our statement that the Campster platform had interactive content, while 22.7% of them were neutral/uncertain, 13.7% of them disagreed.
5.8. *The Campster platform has certain disadvantages*

It was important for us to find out if the students perceived any shortcomings within the Campster platform. The students from the University of Novi Sad gave the following answers: 28.6% of them *agreed* with our statement, 14.3% were *neutral/uncertain*, and 57.1% of them *disagreed* with our statement. At the University of Iași, we got the following results: 27.3% of them *strongly agreed* with our statement that the Campster platform had certain shortcomings, while 22.7% of them were *neutral/uncertain*, and 50% of them *disagreed*. 
5.9. The Romanian language is easier to learn with additional materials

From the University of Novi Sad, 93.75% of students, agreed with our statement, and 6.25% of them were neutral/uncertain. At the University of Iași, we got the following results: 50% of them strongly agreed with our statement, 18.2% of them agreed, 9.1% were neutral/uncertain, while 22.7% of them disagreed.
5.10. Testing within courses is appropriate

During each course, after every covered area, it was necessary for a student to take a test in order to move on to the next area. And at the end of the completed course, it was necessary to take the final test. Students gave the following answers about testing within the Campster platform: the students from the University of Novi Sad gave the following answers: 68.75% of them strongly agreed that the testing was done appropriately, 12.5% agreed, while 6.25% of them were neutral/uncertain and 12.5% disagreed. At the University of Iași, we got the following results: 59.1% of them strongly agreed with our statement, while 31.8% of them agreed, and 9.1% disagreed.

5.11. While using the Campster platform, I had appropriate support

It was very important that students have support and help when using an additional material in class and outside of class. We were interested in whether they received an appropriate support when they failed to continue, or whether they had a problem of a technical nature. The students from the University of Novi Sad answered as follows: 64.3% of them strongly agreed, while 14.3% of them were agreed and 7.1% were neutral/uncertain, and 14.3% of them strongly disagreed. At the University of Iași, the results were slightly better, with 90.9% of them who strongly agreed and 9.1% of them who were neutral/uncertain.
5.12. The most visited courses of the Campster platform

The largest number of students from Serbia chose the following courses: Copywriter\(^4\), How to learn a foreign language? – Cum să învățați o limbă străină?\(^5\) and Assertive Communication – Comunicare asertivă\(^6\). At the same time, the students in Romania chose the following courses: Assertive Communication – Comunicare asertivă, Time management\(^7\), Freelance business tips – Toate sfaturile pentru afaceri freelance\(^8\).

5.13. Overview of obtained results

→ The Campster platform has courses in the Romanian language free of charge that can be used as an additional material in the Romanian language.
→ The respondents are from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia and the University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Romania.

\(^4\) https://www.thecampster.com/ro/course/view?slug=copywriter-
\(^5\) https://www.thecampster.com/ro/course/view?slug=Cum-s%C4%83-%C3%AEnv%C4%83%C8%9Ba%C8%9Bi-o-limb%C4%83-str%C4%83in%C4%83
\(^6\) https://www.thecampster.com/ro/course/view?slug=comunicare-asertiv%C4%83-
\(^7\) https://www.thecampster.com/ro/course/view?slug=time-management-275
\(^8\) https://www.thecampster.com/ro/course/view?slug=toate-sfaturile-pentru-afaceri-freelance-
In Serbia, the majority of respondents were female, while in Romania, the majority of students were male.

The dominant age at both universities was between 21 and 24.

Most students from Serbia and Romania agreed that the Campster platform was useful for learning and that it had well-organized contents.

Online platforms could help in learning Romanian as a foreign language.

Most students of both universities believed that it was not necessary to have advanced computer skills in order to use the Campster platform.

The platform had interactive contents.

There were no major shortcomings in terms of use and contents.

Almost all students believed that the Romanian language was easier to learn with additional materials, as well as that the testing method was appropriate.

They had appropriate support from professors and technical support of the Campster platform.

At the University of Novi Sad, most students chose the Copywriter course, while at the University of Iași, most students chose the Assertive Communication course.

6. CONCLUSION

The use of new technologies in language teaching has a positive effect both on the teaching process itself and on the motivation of students. Today’s students are not satisfied with the teaching materials they learn in class, they need additional support and motivation, additional engagement within their field of interest, which is the digital world. If we offer them appropriate platforms, applications and opportunities for their improvement outside of the institutional learning (which is the basis for any further advancement), it is possible to achieve exceptional results. Based on the research we conducted with students learning the Romanian language as a foreign language in Serbia, at the Faculty of Philosophy, and in Romania, at the University of Iași, we can conclude that the Campster platform is an excellent additional resource based on attitudes and results of the survey of these two groups of students. The monitoring lasted for one semester, students often came to classes asking for an explanation for a certain type of vocabulary used or how to find a suitable translation. Also, it is important to note that this type of teaching, when contact with the lecturer does not end after class, but continues with learning and interaction on platforms and forums within the platform, contributes to establishing
trust and respect between professors and students. The Campster platform has courses in the Romanian language free of charge, which are useful for learning and which have well-organized contents, and can help in learning the language. In addition, the main conclusion of the students is that they have learned the language by attending courses on the topics that they are interested in within their private life, such as Copywriting, Assertive Communication or Time Management. Also, it is important that the platforms have a simple interface and that they do not require advanced computer skills. What has been confirmed with the Campster platform is that there are no shortcomings in terms of use and contents, which is also contributed by its interactive contents.

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Кампстер платформа за Е-УЧЕЊЕ: ДОДАТНИ ОБРАЗОВНИ МАТЕРИЈАЛ У НАСТАВИ РУМУНСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА. СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА

Резиме

Коришћење нових технологија у настави језика има позитиван ефекат на сам процес наставе, али и на мотивацију студената. Данашњи студенти се не задовољавају градивом које науче на часу, њима су потребни додатни подстицај и мотивација, додатно ангажовање у оквиру области које их интересују, а то је дигитални свет. Уколико им понудимо одговарајуће платформе, апликације и могућности за усавршавање ван институционалног учења (које је основа за свако даље напредовање) могу се постићи изузетни резултати. Циљ рада је да испита ставове студената о коришћењу додатних материјала у настави румунског као страног језика, у Србији и Румунији, на Универзитету у Новом Саду и Универзитету „Александру Јоан Куза“ у Јашију. Студенти су током зимског семестра школске 2021/2022. користили платформу Кампстер и бесплатне курсеве који се на њој налазе. Поменути курсеви се могу користити као додатни материјал и наставу румунског језика као страног учинити интерактивном. У испитивању ставова учествовали су две групе студената, из сваке земље по једна. Већина испитаника сагласна је да Кампстер платформа има добро организоване садржаје, помаже у усавршавању румунског језика, није потребно имати напредне рачунарске вештине. Курсеви на Кампстер платформи су интерактивни и прилагођени потребама студената. Садржај је мултимедијални а тестирање одговарајуће, будући да даје константну процену напратка. Подршка коју су студенти имали у току рада и учења од великог је значаја за несметано коришћење платформе.

Кључне речи: онлайн настава, учење румунског језика као страног језика, Кампстер платформа, Универзитет у Новом Саду, Србија, Универзитет „Александру Јоан Куза“, Јаши, Румунија.