

Enhancing language, literature and culture teaching and learning throughout ICTS implementation

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Abstract. One of the guidelines of the *Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020* implies the implementation of modern ICTs onto teaching and learning methods of both existing and newly developed study programs pertaining to higher education area. The Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, being a highly reputable and prestigious higher education institution and cherishing a long tradition in education and research in the field of language, literature and culture, strives to continuously and increasingly develop its study programs by introducing ICTs at all levels of study. Our main objective is to enhance language, literature and culture teaching and learning experience throughout blended learning. Namely, the Faculty of Philology offers, within its Moodle platform, the wealth of courses concerning different languages, literatures and cultures, as well as those belonging to social sciences (e.g. courses in developmental and educational psychology). In this way, we intend to provide our students the opportunity of acquiring comprehensive knowledge in the field of philology, literary science, cultural studies and social sciences in general, the kind of education which is indeed required of the modern age man. We also took into account the fact that the use of digital technologies is becoming prevalent in a number of learning processes and that, hence, their implementation is invaluable particularly in the field of higher education.

The Faculty of Philology is extremely proud of the learning content to be found on the faculty's Moodle platform, and of the fact that it is becoming richer and more diverse every year. Courses on the undergraduate level of studies are currently divided in 20 subgroups out of 38 study groups, which involve the following: *Serbian Language and Literature, Serbian Literature and Language with Comparative Studies, General Literature and Theory of Literature, General Linguistics, Library and Information Science*, fourteen different languages or language groups (such as for example *Scandinavian languages*), as well as *Seminar of Social Sciences*. Each of these subgroups offers a variety of courses, which all together constitute a rich repository of knowledge in the field of philology, literary science and cultural studies. At the MA level of studies, the courses offered on the faculty's Moodle platform within *Language, Literature, Culture* study program include over forty different subjects. We are currently working diligently as to offer the variety of high quality learning contents within the relatively new MA study program *Cultures in Dialogue* in a blended learning format. For now, the

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contents are available for the courses *Encounter of Civilizations* and *Elements of Western Civilization*. As for the courses belonging to *Language, Literature, Culture* study program at the PhD level of studies, these also include a vast number of courses on all three modules. In this paper, we intend to emphasize as to how far we have come in placing learning contents onto the faculty's Moodle platform and the implications that this variety of content will have on educating future philologists in Serbia, who will, hence, gain more comprehensive knowledge than ever before in the field of philology and humanities and social sciences in general.

Keywords: language, literature, culture, teaching, learning, ICT, blended learning, Moodle, Faculty of Philology, humanities and social sciences;

1. Implementing ICTS in higher education

The use of digital technologies is becoming prevalent in a number of learning processes, but their implementation is particularly invaluable in the framework of higher education. In fact, today “there is no university in the world that does not already have the digital platform or campus to develop part of their learning activities or even most of these”¹ online and by means of ICTs. Universities have come to fully grasp the fact that the “integration of technology can help to create courses that are easier and more effective for learners, especially if ICT and E-learning are integrated into the educational process.”² Modern digital technologies have also created the possibilities of e-learning or as Arif Sari noted in his article *Influence of ICT applications on learning process in higher education* “ICT-based education serves the purpose of both attended and non-attended (distance) education types.”³ Furthermore, modern ICTs have led to a change in thinking on what actually represents academic literacy, as it nowadays “includes considerable need for digital literacies, particularly but not exclusively those relating to information literacy.”⁴, whereas “the degree of ICT literacy is indicated by knowledge, attitude and behavior toward the information and technology.”⁵ Pavla Slechtova notes that young people who have grown up with modern information and communication technologies “could be designated as digital natives to express their belonging to a certain age generation influenced by technologies embedded in all kinds of human activities.”⁶ Since they represent the target group of today's study programs, it is only logical that

¹ Duță, N., & Martínez-Rivera, O. (2015). Between Theory and Practice: The Importance of ICT in Higher Education as a Tool for Collaborative Learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180, p. 1467.

² Salehi, H., Shojaei, M., & Sattar, S. (2014). Using E-Learning and ICT Courses in Educational Environment: A Review. *English Language Teaching*, 8(1), p. 63.

³ Sari, A. (2014). Influence of ICT Applications on Learning Process in Higher Education. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, p. 4939.

⁴ Simpson, R., & Obdalova, O. A. (2014). New Technologies in Higher Education—ICT Skills or Digital Literacy?. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 154, p. 110.

⁵ Perbawaningsih, Y. (2013). Plus minus of ICT usage in higher education students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 103, p. 720.

⁶ Slechtova, P. (2015). Attitudes of Undergraduate Students to the Use of ICT in Education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 171, p. 1133.

universities should include digital technologies into teaching on an adequate scale and modernize the way of conveying learning contents. Otherwise, universities may become somewhat outdated institutions and young people may rather opt for e-learning courses and study programs. Serbian educational system largely harmonized its study programs with the European educational area, and it is dedicated to introducing ICTs in teaching processes.

Application of ICTs in Serbian Higher Education Institutions

The demand in the Serbian labor market is more than ever focused on the jobs pertaining to the IT sector. As a result, Serbia has a growing number of highly educated IT professionals and programmers. This tendency also speaks of the need to implement ICTs in all fields, but especially in higher education. The *Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020*, formulated by the Government of the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, supports the introduction of modern ICTs in both existing and newly developed study programs. The Strategy suggests that "the benefits of information-communication technologies (ICT) will be utilised, as well as different forms of on-line learning (electronic conferences, subject blogs, discussion forums, electronic testing, etc.)."⁷ It also emphasizes the necessity of adjusting educational programs and teaching processes to the needs of the information society. This further implies training of teaching staff for applying modern teaching methods, which are enhanced with digital technologies.

Nowadays, the majority of Serbian universities offer courses in some sort of e-learning format. Learning through ICTs is implemented mainly by means of e-learning platforms. "Moodle (short for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is present since 2002, and after more than ten years of existence it is very popular among educators around the world. Out of all open source systems, this is the most prevalent in Serbia."⁸ When using the notions of online or e-learning there is still a certain level of misunderstanding in Serbia, considering that most of these courses belong to blended model of learning. The Faculty of Philology designed blended learning study program *Language, Literature, Culture*, by combining traditional lectures held in brick and mortar space of the faculty and e-learning environment of Moodle platform. Hereafter, we will present the current situation and results in regards to the implementation of ICTs in the framework of LLC study program.

2. The faculty of philology of the university of Belgrade

The Faculty of Philology, as an integral part of the University of Belgrade, is dedicated to cherishing, developing and disseminating knowledge in the domain

⁷ The Government of Republic of Serbia. (2012). *Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020*. p. 65. Available at: <http://erasmusplus.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Strategy-for-Education-Development-in-Serbia-2020.pdf>, accessed on: 15.01.2016.

⁸ Čamilović, D. (2013). *Visokoškolsko obrazovanje na daljinu*. *Tranzicija*, 15(31.), p. 32.

of philology, i.e. study of living languages. Prior to World War II, its organisational structure was a result of a decades-long tradition of organising the study of philological disciplines at the Advanced School and the University of Belgrade, but particularly at the Faculty of Philosophy. The Faculty of Philology became an independent institution in 1960, when additional foreign language and literature departments were included in its structure. Nowadays, the Faculty of Philology represents a unified institution of higher education where the study of 34 different foreign languages, literatures and cultures is offered and a key institution of higher education in Serbia in terms of educating experts on the Serbian language and literature, culture, as well as librarianship and informatics.

Language, Literature, Culture study program - aims and outcomes

Bearing in mind the wealth and diversity of the fields that are taught at the Faculty of Philology, we have created *Language, Literature, Culture* study program as a structural integration of teaching individual languages, literatures and cultures, librarianship and informatics, general linguistics, general literature and literary theory. Namely, we have given our students the opportunity to select subjects depending on the chosen orientation (profile) and their own interests, whereas in each profile of studies there is a set of compulsory and optional subjects. As a result, students may choose language and literature courses that have been designated as belonging to the common core in addition to the compulsory subjects. For example, if a student elects the module *Culture*, the only compulsory subject in each semester during his/her studies would be *Contemporary Cultural Studies*, while he/she can select the remaining courses from any other profile (Language or Literature).

The main aim of LLC study program is to educate philologists of various orientations and librarians-informaticists, while at the same time combining higher education activities with scientific-research activities. Upon completing one of the LLC study profiles, students should acquire fundamental theoretical knowledge from the domains of philology, linguistics, literary studies, culturology or librarianship and library informatics. They should be able to: apply scientific methods and procedures in the process of research; define and solve specific problems in the sphere of language, literature and culture; conduct comparative analysis; gain knowledge of a minimum of two languages; and, finally, be capable of critical thinking and approach to the research process. Furthermore, being conscious of the demands that young people are faced with today in the modern labor market, we wanted the final objective of LLC study program to involve students' ability to adequately apply theoretical knowledge in practice. LLC graduates are equipped to work in diverse areas, such as education, journalism, translation, librarianship, library informatics and culture, as well as in all the other spheres requiring knowledge of foreign languages, literatures and cultures.

3. Using advantages of ICTS at the faculty of philology of the university of Belgrade

The Faculty of Philology intends to continuously and increasingly improve and develop study programs by introducing ICTs at all levels of study. Our main objective is to enhance language, literature and culture teaching and learning experience throughout the model of blended learning. Hence, we offer, within Moodle platform, the wealth of courses focusing on different languages, literatures and cultures, as well as those belonging to social sciences (e.g. courses in developmental and educational psychology). The Faculty of Philology chose Moodle as an open-source learning platform and e-learning environment because it is extremely convenient for storing diverse types of course material (textual, video and audio contents) and bearing in mind that it supports Garrison's *community of inquiry*, which "provides the stabilizing, cohesive influence that balances the open communication and limitless access to information on the Internet"⁹. We opted for this Virtual Learning Environment due to the fact that "while most [VLEs] are instructor-oriented and largely concerned with how course content is delivered, Moodle is based on a learner-oriented philosophy called social constructionist pedagogy, in which students are involved in constructing their own knowledge. (Chavan & Pavri, 2004, p. 129)"¹⁰. The concept of students' active role in their own knowledge acquisition corresponds with the objectives of LLC study program, as we wanted to present our students not only with the opportunity, but also with the responsibility to choose the right combination of courses and decide upon the direction of their own educational path.

In addition to the applied blended learning model, the Faculty of Philology constantly strives at providing its students the access to numerous electronic resources. While having rich library funds within its departments, the faculty also works closely with the University Library "Svetozar Markovic", without whose electronic resources our students cannot imagine literature search and writing scientific research papers. "The Library collection consists of 1.5 million objects and tens of thousands of electronic books and papers."¹¹ The Library possesses the electronic reading room on the first floor where users can get help of librarians when searching electronic resources available in open access or explore the commercial ones, such as those available through KoBSON. "Consortium for coordinated acquisition of Serbian research libraries KoBSON was established in 2001 as a result of a contract between six main research libraries. Ministry for science provides the financial resources and the National Library of Serbia negotiates the contracts with providers of scientific

⁹ Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The internet and higher education*, 7(2), p. 97.

¹⁰ Costello, E. (2013). Opening up to open source: looking at how Moodle was adopted in higher education. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 28(3), p. 195.

¹¹ University of Belgrade. *University Library "Svetozar Markovic"*. Available at: <http://www.bg.ac.rs/en/members/library.php>, accessed on: 21.01.2016.

information.”¹² As a result, students, researchers and staff of the University of Belgrade have access to electronic journals and books.

Considering how important it is to have the cultural heritage in our own possession in electronic form, the Faculty of Philology created its Digital Library. We began by digitalizing our own editions first, which are the backbone of scientific thought in the field of study of 34 languages, literatures and cultures. Until now, 120.000 pages of extremely important editions are digitized and made absolutely searchable. This primarily refers to the periodicals of the Faculty of Philology (*Philology review, Literature and Language, Yearbook of the Department of Serbian Literature*, etc.), but also to a number of doctoral dissertations defended at the Faculty of Philology, proceedings of international scientific conferences, monographs, anthologies and collections. Willing to further improve access to scientific information by means of modern ICTs, the Faculty of Philology has recently achieved the agreement with the Russian State University and thus enabled students free access to the Virtual Reading Room of the Russian university, where over one million texts can be found, as well as 800.000 doctoral dissertations. In the premises of the Russian centre, situated at the Faculty of Philology, students can access their own virtual reader cabinet. Not only that they can read texts and PhD dissertations, which will help them write their own research papers, but the history of viewing and reading the mentioned texts and doctoral dissertations is preserved on their profiles, which further personalizes this virtual reading experience.

3.1 Blended learning as an optimal combination of traditional teaching techniques and modern technologies on BA level of studies

The Faculty of Philology has applied blended learning “in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.”¹³ We have implemented this method of learning bearing in mind how much the use of ICTs has become essential in today’s knowledge economy and guided by the idea that our graduates should master ICTs skills prior to completing their studies. Blended learning courses designed and offered by the Faculty of Philology on the undergraduate level of LLC studies are divided into 20 Moodle subgroups out of 38 faculty’s groups. These include the following: *Serbian Language and Literature, Serbian Literature and Language with Comparative Studies, General Literature and Theory of Literature, General Linguistics, Library and Information Science*, fourteen different languages or language groups (such as

¹² Filipi-Matutinovic, S., & Kosanovic, B. (2007). Correlation of the access to electronic services in Serbia and the presence of Serbian authors in Web of Science. In *INFORUM* (Vol. 2007, p. 13th).

¹³ Staker, H., & Horn, M. B. (2012). Classifying K-12 Blended Learning. *Innosight Institute*. p.3. Available at: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535180.pdf>, accessed on: 21.01. 2016.

for example *Scandinavian languages*), as well as *Seminar of Social Sciences*. Each of these subgroups offers a variety of courses, which all together constitute a rich repository of knowledge in the field of philology, literary science and cultural studies. Although they are designed in accordance with the blended learning model, traditional type of teaching still plays an important part at the BA level of studies, which involves lectures held at the Faculty of Philology. For instance, despite the fact that the tests, which are an integral part of a number of courses, are done through Moodle platform, the final exam (regardless of whether it is in written or oral form) must be taken at the faculty. Therefore, Moodle platform is used as an additional learning tool at the undergraduate level of studies, unlike at the MA and PhD level of studies where the role of Moodle platform is more pronounced.

A number of undergraduate LLC blended learning courses are carried out in the form of consultations. Students gain insight into syllabus and curriculum of diverse courses and decide upon the ones they are most interested in. During consultations with professors, students form a list of obligatory and optional literature and select the topic of their seminar papers. By using the service of Moodle, course participants are receiving the notifications and instructions on the course and deliver the final version of their seminar paper. Moodle is also utilized to suggest and upload course material. Such is the case with the course *Introduction to Italian culture 2* whose primary objective involves the acquisition of basic knowledge and information in regards to Italy, its geographic location, socio-political structure, history and art. The purpose of this course is to stimulate curiosity and the desire of the participants to acknowledge and explore Italy and its rich culture. It is a compulsory course for students from the Department of Italian Language and Literature and an elective course for students from all other groups. This blended learning course uses Moodle as to notify students on all course related information, important dates, possible changes in terms of the date and time of lectures, deadline for submitting seminar papers, etc.¹⁴

3.1.1 MA blended learning courses within the Language, Literature, Culture study program

Blended learning courses offered through the faculty's Moodle platform within *Language, Literature, Culture* study program at the MA level of studies include over forty different subjects. These courses cover diverse areas related to foreign languages, literatures, cultures, linguistics, quantitative and qualitative research methods, translatology, information literacy, modern standards in libraries, foreign language teaching methodology, but also include specialized subjects such as the course entirely dedicated to Luigi Pirandello. The only obligatory course for all MA students is *Techniques of academic writing*, which is also designed in accordance with the blended learning model and set on the faculty's Moodle platform. We are currently working diligently as to develop and offer the variety of high quality learning contents within the relatively new

¹⁴ *Introduction to Italian culture 2* - course information available at the faculty's Moodle e-learning platform. Available at: <http://moodle.fil.bg.ac.rs>, accessed on: 19.01.2016.

MA study program *Cultures in Dialogue* in a blended learning format. For now, the contents are available for the courses *Encounter of Civilizations* and *Elements of Western Civilization*.

In this paper, we will present the MA level courses *The woman in the Spanish literary realism* and *Italian film and literature*. We chose these two examples because they offer an interesting insight into the cultural specificities of these two nations, but particularly because modern ICTs can be best applied to this kind of topics. The first course aims to introduce students to the basis of feminist thought, from its beginnings to modern and postmodern approaches, clarify the specifics of the Spanish society of the 19th century and the position of women in the bourgeois social order. Upon completion of the course, students should be able to recognize the importance of the development of liberalism and conflict with traditional worldviews most representative of the Spanish literary realism and naturalism, use appropriate terminology and actively interpret literary works in the light of feminist and cultural criticism, demonstrate the ability of comparing Spanish feminist thoughts and visions of women in representative texts with similar elements in other national literatures of the same era, etc. Course methodology and forms of teaching include lectures, reading literary works, discussions, independent work (research), written work, but also e-learning by means of Moodle platform.¹⁵ Given the wide scope of the topics, this course represents an optimal example of the necessity to include ICTs into teaching, since there is not enough time to present the whole theme during lectures.

The course *Italian film and literature* gives an interesting insight into the relationship of film and literature and provides a framework for comparative studies. Some of the course objectives involve narratological analysis of film language of the selected films/scenes and the reception of a particular Italian film in Serbia. This course is developed in the form of individual consultations, but also through the Moodle educational platform. Depending on course participants' interests and research priorities, appropriate literature is recommended and students are instructed as to where he/she should focus the attention of their research work. Theoretical knowledge gained during the course lectures is applied at practical training assignments, which occur in diverse cultural institutions dealing with the film and literature, such as Yugoslav Film Archives, Yugoslav Drama Theatre, other theaters, newspapers, publishing houses, etc. Among other things, the list of recommended basic literature is offered on the Moodle platform, as well as the films to be seen by course participants in order to provide answer to one of the topics of the course (movies such as *Così ridevano*, *Le amiche*, *La balia*, *La terra trema : episodio*

¹⁵ *The woman in the Spanish literary realism* - course information available at the faculty's Moodle e-learning platform. Available at: <http://moodle.fil.bg.ac.rs/enrol/index.php?id=4526>, accessed on: 20.01.2016.

del mare, etc.).¹⁶ Bearing in mind the permeating nature of the two arts in digital age and the ever-growing importance of cinematic art, we believe that the blended learning component of the course *Italian film and literature* is indispensable, considering that the Moodle platform provides access to audio and video materials, in addition to text documents.

3.1.2 PhD blended learning courses within the Language, Literature, Culture study program

Language, Literature, Culture PhD study program includes a number of courses offered on all three modules. Bearing in mind that these PhD studies belong to the areas of social-humanistic sciences, linguistics, comparative literature and philology, as well as cultural studies, subjects cover the following narrow scientific fields: philological sciences, methodology of language teaching, methodology of literature teaching, applied linguistics, translation, cultural studies, communicology, library science and information technology, archivistics and the like. When designing this PhD study program, we strived to “enable the students to acquire knowledge and skills and develop scientific abilities so that they could take part in the scientific and research work as independent researchers within national and international projects, and also to independently organize and perform fundamental scientific research in the area of philological sciences, literary science and linguistics (theory and history of literature, comparative literature, methodology of teaching language, literature and culture).”¹⁷

Language, Literature, Culture PhD study program envisages the use of the faculty’s e-learning platform to a much greater extent than on BA and MA level of studies. By fully implementing blended learning, we took into consideration the fact that the topics on doctoral studies must be covered in a more comprehensive manner and that the diversity of presentation of different information and knowledge is indispensable as to achieve this overall comprehensiveness. Hence, we gave our students access, via our Moodle platform, to audio and video materials, in addition to textual content. We have also provided the opportunity for them to exchange opinions on specific topics through forums and communicate with a course professor who “facilitates the discourse and provides direct instruction when required”¹⁸. Through blended learning model, we have also encouraged “participants to make *better* use of face-to-face contact in the knowledge that preparations and follow up can be

¹⁶ *Italian film and literature* - course information available at the faculty’s Moodle e-learning platform. Available at: <http://moodle.fi1.bg.ac.rs/enrol/index.php?id=4467>, accessed on: 20.01.2016.

¹⁷ The Faculty of Philology – University of Belgrade. *Language, Literature, Culture/ PhD study program content*. Available at: <http://www.bg.ac.rs/files/en/members/faculties/phd/Faculty%20of%20Philology%20-%20PhD.pdf>, accessed on: 20.01.2016.

¹⁸ Anderson, T. et al. *Assessing teacher presence in a computer conferencing context*. (2001). p.5. Available at: http://auspace.athabascau.ca/bitstream/2149/725/1/assessing_teaching_presence.pdf, accessed on: 20.01. 2016.

conducted online”¹⁹. In addition, a number of doctoral students do not live in the capital city of Serbia; hence, they cannot always attend lectures. Therefore, lectures by visiting professors are recorded and made available by means of the faculty’s Moodle platform. In this way, we can also facilitate a course of study to people with disabilities and to other vulnerable categories.

In order to describe the implementation of modern ICTs within LLC doctoral study program in blended learning format, we will present obligatory course for the module Culture - *Contemporary cultural studies*. The main objectives of this course include the following: introducing students to the concept of culture, civilization and multiculturalism; familiarization with the prevailing theories of culture and development of thoughts on culture; comparison of different cultural aspects of societies (national history, religion, politics, economics, education) that influenced the formation of society; analytical overview of the French culture, as well as American, Chinese, Japanese, and many other; theoretical consideration of different cultural traditions (through the observation of diverse value systems, the position of women, the role of the family, etc.) and their impact on the pace of modernization and current state of modern cultural environments.²⁰ Being aware of the extensiveness of these topics, we have designed the course *Contemporary cultural studies* in accordance with blended learning guidelines, which imply that although students ought to attend lectures, they can obtain sufficient number of information through the faculty’s e-platform. Lectures of visiting professors are recorded so that the course participants can hear it even if they were not present at a lecture or may hear it once again before writing the essay on a given topic. These essays are then uploaded by students onto the Moodle platform by the specified deadline. On the Moodle platform course participants may also find information related to the course, list of literature, submit the assignments and seminar papers, have an overview of suggested topics, participate in forums, etc.

We have noted that the blended learning model corresponds well with this type of courses, primarily because doctoral candidates should independently develop their PhD thesis and considering that doctoral studies are much less directed than for example undergraduate studies. Other blended learning courses offered within the LLC PhD study program include: *Interdisciplinarity in Exploring the Relationship between Language and Society*, *Language in Teaching*, *Cognitive Linguistics*, *Theories of L2 and Teaching Practice*, *History of Libraries*, *Comparative Studies*, *Theory of Librarianship*, *The Book - Traditional and Electronic*, *Cultural Traditions of Asia*, *World and Japanese Literature*, *Theories of Knowledge*, *Knowledge Management*, etc.

¹⁹ Mason, R., & Rennie, F. (2006). *E-learning: the key concepts*. Routledge. p.32.

²⁰ *Contemporary cultural studies* - course information available at the faculty’s Moodle e-learning platform. Available at: <http://moodle.fil.bg.ac.rs/enrol/index.php?id=4546>, accessed on: 20.01.2016.

4. Conclusions

Throughout the implementation of blended learning model, particularly by placing learning contents onto the Faculty of Philology's Moodle platform, we believe that we have achieved an adequate level of the ICTs use in higher education. The implications that this variety of content will have on educating future philologists in Serbia are of paramount importance for producing experts in the above-mentioned scientific fields (primarily its application in the course of doctoral studies). Upon completion of *Language, Literature, Culture* study program, graduates will gain more comprehensive knowledge than ever before in the field of philology, humanities and social sciences in general. We believe that this kind of versatility will prepare them for the knowledge economy and constantly changing labor market.

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