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Using technologies for teaching English Tomsk Polytechnic University

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Abstract

This paper studies today’s role of modern technologies for teaching and learning English as a foreign language. There are too many kinds of technologies (some of them are obsolete). Thus, we should try to classify and choose technologies that are more suitable for learning English and try to find out what advantages or disadvantages they have. In addition, there is quite an important question that is considered in this paper: what barriers and obstacles for implementing modern technologies we have now and how we can overcome them. In conclusion, we are going to offer ways of developing technologies for learning English.

Keywords: Modern technologies, implementation, introducing;

1. Introduction

In the modern, rapidly changing and developing world, it is difficult to overestimate the role and importance of technologies in various areas of our life. The studying and teaching English are not an exception. Looking back a couple of decades, it is hard to believe that progress has gone so far and, despite all the innovativeness and complicity of the technologies, many of them are quite affordable for the general population. More or less, technologies are introduced at different levels of education - from elementary schools to universities. This extension of using technologies is becoming ubiquitous; however, this trend has its advantages and disadvantages. The aim of this article is to reveal these advantages and disadvantages, as well as to emphasize the main and most popular technologies that are used in the educational field. Additionally, suggesting possible ways of developing the educational process and curriculums in the future is another aim of interest that could shape how English is taught and studied.

2. Current studies in the use of technology in education

There is a large number of technologies for learning English (EL), however, it is necessary to pay attention to one important specialty: English is becoming a global language. This means the EL is going to be a tool for communication anywhere in the world. Thus, the priorities and goals of language learning are changing. The English of the future is not the English of Shakespeare or the royal family of Britain. Strict grammar rules go into the background, while the skills that allow you to express your thoughts and to be understood in any situation have become important and necessary. A lot of information about the “global English” can be found in [3], there are a lot

of words about the change in the concept of teaching and the transition to a new curriculum around the world, with the aim of popularization of a language. In this paper, you can find opinions both for and against the use of innovations (for example, 3. Galloway N. [3] tell about the importance of technologies but Numajiri T. [3] disagree with them).

The study of British scientists (who supports the introduction new technologies in education) [5] about the possibility of using gesture recognition technology during Skype conferences is very interesting. The gist of the study was as follows: a group of people involved in the study of EL is located in different places (it can be a cafe, library, etc.). They all have a piece of general information. As a result of their communication, during which they actively use gestures and simple words in English, they need to solve the task by collecting all the necessary information (through describing different items). Probably, this technology is not for learning EL, but it has indirect, useful impact on students.

There are a lot of technologies used in the educational process (software applications, websites, virtual models for experiments, bank storages [1]). However, we are interested only in technologies that allow us to study EL. All electronic materials, applications, servers, devices, computers have a virtual space. Generally, virtual space is considered to be a total of web resources, hardware, and software components and, of course, human resources [6]. In this paper, we want to explain what software technologies are available now. There is at least one good technology for all language skills that can help to improve them [7]. For example, for improving listening skills we can use different podcasts or video hosting (TED, YouTube). For speaking skills, “Skype” is the best option. However, to improve your vocabulary or grammar skills you should use different training software applications (of course you can use electronic books which is a part of virtual space too, but this way is not so attractive). We analysed some technologies and can see a problem clearly – all of them are separated applications and technologies and it would be better to have a multifunctional application that can unite all of them.

One of the most popular applications is “Lingualeo”. This application is a system that determines your strengths and weaknesses and develops a training program. The authors also provide a motivation system to maintain interest. We can highlight the next disadvantages: a part of the content is not for free and there is not a wide range of topics in the technical field. The majority of reviews are positive, and it proves the above-mentioned information about the application, but there are some negative reviews concerning the fact that there is no possibility of studying English from scratch and you are to buy a premium account to get additional materials.

Another famous application is “Duolingo”. Using this application, you can study not only English but also other languages. It can be used as an additional source of studying a foreign language from scratch. However, there are some disadvantages that have been found by users: terrible level of technical support; not all operating systems support this application. Some users stated that application works perfectly not for all operating systems.

3. Using technologies for teaching EL in universities

The situation with technology use is slightly different at universities. Due to the active research activities of students, technologies are developing at universities, but not so many of these technologies are at the implementation stage (because of various reasons). The technologies, such as augmented (AR) or virtual reality (VR) are often very progressive and it can be a barrier for widespread implementation because not all users are good at using these technologies. These technologies will be in the curriculum soon, however, it is reasonable to discuss more simple technologies that are available to everyone now – mobile applications.

The relevance of the introduction of mobile technologies can be explained by the following: the specificity of the subject “Foreign Language” (optional EL) requires the presence of

structured and relevant materials, depending on the specific direction of study (bachelor's or master's degrees); a unified teaching methodology that meets requirements of the educational program is quite important too. However, today a very small number of universities use mobile applications in their educational activities. If they use them, it is most likely, for a particular case. Moreover, these technologies are out-of-date (for example, Moodle). The description of the implementation problems and processes of introducing mobile, Internet and other modern technologies into the educational process can be found in scientific publications of Russian scientists (M.A. Bovtenko, G.A. Vorobiev, B.A. Kruze, E.S. Polat, Yu. K. Babansky, A.S. Belkin, A.A. Verbitsky, B.S. Gershunsky, G.N. Serikov, etc.) and foreign ones (Kern R., Helmer O., Rescher N., Hampel R., etc. [5]). They give a lot of interesting thoughts about problems in introducing different approaches.

An extremely important point is that it is necessary to begin the introduction of technologies and adaptation of them into educational programs from the initial stages, for example, from secondary school. The importance of this statement is explained by American scientists [2], [4]. They note that it is not necessary to have any sophisticated devices to use innovations beyond the usual tablet or smartphone. For example, in one of the studies, students using a tablet, GPS and specialized software (free access in the internet) examined surrounding school areas for a sufficient number of trees. Afterward, they made a conclusion about the need for additional planting. Moreover, at the same time, they increased their skills in using the EL. Thus, we can conclude that language is a dynamically developing system; this system is developing hand to hand with technologies. In addition, to make the study of EL easier, it is just necessary to rebuild curriculums and introduce innovations.

Even now, there is a huge number of different mobile applications for studying a foreign language; there are few applications for forming the competencies of students in technical specialties. Sometimes, it is possible to find good applications for learning a foreign language, but functionality provided for free is too limited, the application does not have the necessary specifics, or the price is too high, and ordinary students cannot afford it for themselves. Thus, there is a need to create a unified application and a unified approach to using this application.

However, to get a high-quality application we have to analyse the existed applications and find out what we can take from them to make our own product. We can say that the existed applications ("Lingualeo" or "Duolingo") are quite good to learn languages from scratch, but no so good for students who want to improve Professional English.

Conclusion

Summing up, we have to conclude that the implementation of these technologies in education is inevitable. This is happening now, and we have already had results. The need for printed materials is not necessary, as pertinent information is freely available in the Internet. Additionally, there are various interactive and entertaining types of teaching, however, here we can highlight a disadvantage of modern technologies (including the Internet) as they have an abundance of information. Sometimes it can be difficult to filter good information sources. The second disadvantage in the dynamic development of technologies is that when one technology is introduced, after a short period it will become out-of-date. However, in modern times, the use of technologies, in particular, mobile applications, is a very important task for universities.

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