USE OF WEB-TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to identify innovative ways of enhancing communication skills in English. The article gives an overview of available technologies for foreign language teaching. The authors emphasize the importance of using digital tools in the learning process and introduce some teachers' experience of integrating web technologies into practice.

Keywords: digital tools, electronic devices, communication, educational platform, improvement.

Introduction

Drawing from the realities of the modern world a graduate or a young specialist has to be able to speak a foreign language fluently and understand the interlocutor both in everyday communication and in various situations arising in the workplace. At the same time, the curriculum of high school in Ukraine often emphasizes the study of grammatical and lexical constructions, devoting very little study time to developing and improving the understanding of foreign speech by ear. The ability to understand the interlocutor and react correctly to what he has said is the basis for easy conversation. However, well-assimilated speech cliches and frequent repetition of them in various monological and dialogical statements at the lessons do not guarantee free communication with the native speaker.

The development of skills in English through web-technologies

Nowadays, many educational institutions are in the habit of inviting a teacher from abroad to conduct lectures or seminars for their students. Such practice is very useful: it gives the opportunity to evaluate one's own knowledge and expand the horizons of students. But it is not possible to make such studies regular in the framework of every high school curriculum. We should keep in mind, however, that we are teaching a generation for which the use of various electronic devices has become an integral part of everyday life. Therefore, training using modern technologies makes it closer and clearer to the experience and proficiencies of modern students, and emphasizes the real need of applying the knowledge they gain, in practice.

The rapid development of Internet technologies has already introduced new methods and technologies into the learning process such as slide presentations, digital storytelling, webquests, web projects, etc. How can these web technologies optimize the work of students in the classroom and improve their language skills?

First, the use of web technologies implies group interaction, attracting users to the collective filling of content and multiple reconciliations of information. Group work is very important while studying foreign languages, as it ensures the maximum potential of the communicative activity of students. Hence, we assume that the use of web technologies is one of the ways to increase the effectiveness of teaching speaking at a foreign language lesson.

Secondly, according to E.V. Vulfovich, web technologies can be used to carry out a number of tasks. They allow:

1)   communicating, leaving comments (Livejournal, Twitter, Blogger, Blogspot, Facebook):

2)   creating professional portfolios (Linkendin, Mahara):

3)   creating encyclopedias – due to wiki technology (Wikipedia, Letopisi):

4)   publishing articles (Elibrary, Mendeley, Academia, SSRN);

5)   posting photos, collages, posters, tables, graphics (Flicker, Minus, fotki. Yandex):

6)   posting presentations (Slideshare, Prezi):

7)   putting online videos (YouTube):

8)   using cloud storage to share photos, videos, presentations (Soro, Dropbox);

9)   creating pages with bookmarks or links (Diigo, Delicious, Pinterest);

10)   exchanging messages and conducting conferences (ICQ, Skype) *(Vulfovich, 2014)*.

In this article we are going to consider and describe the pedagogical potential of some popular web-technologies which can be used in the educational process when teaching a foreign language, namely English, to improve language skills.

Blogs (or network diaries) are one of the most common educational platforms on the internet. They, focus on the organization of the personal information of the user in the form of a diary.

From A.V. Filatova's point of view, the technology of blogs allows posting, storing, processing and transmitting various kinds of information and searching for it in an array of data, as well as creating communities, which can be managed by several people, with personal access settings for authors and commentators *(Filatova, 2009)*.

Creating a blog is relatively easy as there are a large number of web services on the Internet that provide platforms for this purpose. The most popular of them are Blogger, LiveJournal and WordPress. Other resources for creating educational blogs include

SchoolBlogs, Blogosphere, Weblogg-ed, etc. These sites contain information related to current trends in the development of blogs and their use in education.

A. V. Filatova suggests using individual and collective educational blogs in the educational process. These can belong to both teachers and students *(Filatova, 2009)*.

The teacher's blog usually contains information about the subject including the curriculum; information about the material studied at a particular lesson; training tasks; a list of recommended sources for further study; links to online tests for independent work, etc. While working with the teacher's blog, students develop reading and speaking skills to conduct discussions on professional topics in a foreign language.

Individual educational blogs can serve as an electronic portfolio for a student, containing a collection of materials demonstrating personal progress over time. While working with an individual educational blog, students develop reading and writing skills, as well as the ability to single out and extract essential data and information and assess its importance. They learn to use language tools necessary for self-presentation, presentation of their country and culture in a foreign environment, expression of opinion, including expressing agreement and disagreement when addressing comments. The blog can also contain information of a personal nature about students' family, friends, hobbies, achievements, interesting links, photo, and video materials.

A collective educational blog is designed for the out-of-class work of a group. In the blog a teacher posts training tasks, reference information, materials for commenting (text, audio, video format). Unlike individual educational blogs, a collective educational blog displays students' comments on a single page, which disseminates the opinions of others and stimulates discussion. Each participant can express his/her own point of view on the issue under discussion, hear the opinions of others, learn to perceive cultural diversity as the norm of coexistence in a modern multicultural world, and develop critical thinking skills. When organizing work in a collective educational blog, it is important to involve the maximum number of people in the discussion.

When they participate in a collective educational blog students develop the ability to present theses and brief messages on the content of foreign language texts; use language tools necessary for expressing opinions, thus manifesting the agreement/disagreement dialectic in a non-categorical form; make comparisons, draw analogies and contrasts, and argue their point of view using available language tools.

S.V. Titova notes that due to the use of blogs we can observe the growth of students' cognitive development, the increase of motivation in the study of foreign languages, and an increase in creative self-realization. It is also possible to notice the improvement of critical thinking skills, independent work, and the research and analysis of information. Blogs allow for optimal conditions for the formation of future specialists' intercultural competence due to visual presentation of educational material. Other advantages of blogs are that they are free-of-charge, easy to use, and accessible *(Titova, 2004)*.

Podcasts are another important communication tool in the modern world. Podcasting is a technology for digital content broadcasting, which is the creation, placement and distribution through the Internet of media streams (audio or video files) available for listening or viewing by users. A podcast is a single file or a series of regularly updated files published at a specific address in the Internet.

Podcasting is successfully used in the foreign language learning process. Currently, there are a large number of educational materials, specially designed in the form of podcasts. These can be both authentic podcasts created by native speakers, and educational podcasts

created for educational purposes. Depending on the specific training tasks, they can be used for individual and group work; in the classroom and at home; as part/a final stage of the project work and at during lessons. There are different types of podcasts related to the study of foreign languages:

‒ podcasts helpful for the work with vocabulary, where a podcaster explains the meaning of a word, phrase or idiom and illustrates their use with the examples of functioning of the introduced lexical units in the language;

‒ podcasts aimed at the development of listening skills which include listening tasks;

‒ podcasts specially designed to conduct the whole class in a foreign language – such podcasts are usually supposed to be attended with a handout.

Interesting podcasts for English learners, for instance, are provided by the World BBC News Service (www.bbc.co.uk/radio/podcasts/).

Podcasts can act not only as a means to develop listening skills, but also as a tool to improve speaking. Trainees (and teachers) can create podcasts themselves using free audio programs, for example, Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net).

As a web technology podcasting has a number of advantages. It allows you to listen to or view educational materials anywhere and anytime (on the condition of having an access to the internet) without being limited within the classroom and curriculum hours and being able to distribute the study time to your advantage in the most convenient way. Podcasts can be listened to an unlimited number of times, as a whole or in parts. In general, students themselves can set the most suitable educational tempo.

One of the most effective ways to enhance the skills of speaking and understanding foreign speech by ear, in our opinion, can be the improvement of communication skills in English using the Internet conference method in real time. Tools such as video-conferencing offer teachers the opportunity to link to other classes around the world, also gaining support from other teachers and students. Probably the most efficient technology advancement has come in the form of FaceTime and Skype as it gives learners the advantage of communicating in real-time conversations with English speakers. The lack of available communication in English makes our speech somewhat artificial, and this technique provides a solution to this problem because it gives the students an opportunity to interact with a native speaker in their native environment. Since language and culture are intimately connected, it is essential that students get a good feel for the target language in a cultural context and not just in the classroom. For more reluctant learners, the appeal of an exotic culture might be just the motivation they need to finally master a given language unit. This kind of cultural exposure can be difficult to get, especially if the teacher is not a native speaker of the target language himself/herself. Thus, Skype can be a very effective tool.

Video conferencing can also facilitate communication between English learners and native speakers. This tool is used to bring the participants together over distance and exchange their cultural experiences. An Indian teacher Shruti Sharma makes use of video conferencing and text-based discussions, on a platform offered by Generation Global (http://generation.global/), to connect to classes in other parts of India and abroad (Italy and Indonesia). Students engage in exchanges on different topics which helps them to enhance their digital literacy and their speaking and listening skills. After the video conferencing session, students work in small groups to share their opinions with each other. According to Shruti the use of technology has, without a doubt, made her students more confident and she suggests that other teachers use these methods for building communication skills. In her view

combining academic sessions with real-life experiences will make learners more interested in language study, which would in turn help in gaining knowledge (*Motterum, 2017).*

These activities and technologies are based on the real-life needs of the learners and are used to simulate situations in which they have to use English. For instance, if the future mangers need to give presentations in English, they practice this activity in the lesson using a tablet or a laptop, a projector and a whiteboard. The students' presentations can be recorded and watched later to give feedback. Conference call, webinar and online meeting simulations are held via Skype, which are tools used by companies. The teacher can give feedback after the lesson. In order to practise email writing the educational platform is used.

The opportunity to learn a foreign language through Skype is currently offered by many schools, and even private individuals. So the ILE-school in California (http://www.ile-school.com) offers a method of studying English based on Skype. Communicating with teachers from different countries, students learn to perceive English the same way as if they heard it in real life. One can not but admit that educational audio materials are cleared of the idioms and phraseological units of live speech, and are often artificially slowed down and cleared of the noise accompanying our everyday communication. We get a more accurate representation of vibrant language, when we use authentic video materials, and feature and documentary films in English. However, it should be noted that all feature films are built on the basis of some storyline, and therefore, the possibility of contextual guessing is great in which listeners determine the meaning of a phrase for themselves without going into the meaning of its components. Studying a foreign language with teachers of the ILE-school, students do not see the face of the teacher and should perceive what is said by ear as with an audio record. At the same time it is always possible to ask the teacher to repeat or explain what has been said so it turns out to be not one-side comprehension, but full-fledged communication.

An additional factor in developing students' cognitive activity, and facilitating their desire to understand the interlocutor and get her/him to catch their ideas, is that the teacher does not speak the language of the trainees, and therefore can not help or prompt the listener. Teachers working with a group of trainees often change, which excludes the possibility of getting used to one person's speech and style of conducting classes, which brings training sessions closer to the real life situations.

By analyzing and pronouncing texts from various spheres of life, students improve their skills of speaking and understanding English by ear, and learn modern meanings of some expressions, i.e. obtain information which it would be impossible to acquire by learning the language through dictionaries and reference books.

Depending on the level of the group's knowledge, the training course is divided into 6 parts. Beginning with the simplest – Survival (the level of survival in the country of the studied language) coming to the most advanced – Proficiency Level (this level allows fluent and spontaneous discussion with native speakers of complex, abstract and specific topics, including narrowly specialized ones) *(Melnichenko, Tiepliakovskaia, 2015).*

Classes which are based on Internet conferences should be preceded by a definite portion of work with new material. A few days before the class, students receive a text or an audio file with the same text, which they have to work on at home or, if possible, in a classroom with a teacher. Thus, the student comes to the online lesson knowing new vocabulary, the content of the text and being prepared to talk on a definite topic using particular scope of prepared cliches and set expressions.

Working with students, native speaking English teachers offer a number of interesting exercises that help to remove lexical difficulties and practice correct pronunciation of new words and phrases. S. G. Melnichenko and A. N. Tiepliakovskaia note such exercises as:

1. Making up sentences with a new word by every student and their presentation, first in oral and then in writing form. It allows all the students to work simultaneously. The correction work involves not only ear-, but also visual support (students can see the sentences corrected by the teacher on the screen).

2. Answering various comprehension questions. Not only the correctness of the text comprehension is checked, but also the skill of searching for the necessary information quickly and the ability to convey ideas in expanded sentences (at the initial stage the teacher requires a complete answer to every question, at more advanced levels, the answer within the framework of the topic with the student's own comments is welcomed);

3. Listening to a mini-text based on new lexical units (the text is made up by the teacher and students are not familiar with it). It allows assimilation of new words and phrases, improving listening and speaking skills in the process of responding;

4. Perfecting pronunciation skills and correct English intonation on the basis of the mini-text described above. It makes possible imprinting the language cliches in memory, improving skills of clear and correct reproduction of speech structures, and correct understanding of grammatical structures of introduced phrases *(Melnichenko, Tiepliakovskaia, 2015).*

The use of short films and clips can impact the English learning process as well. Film watching and film making can improve the progress in reading, writing and speaking. The introduction of inexpensive and accessible tools and the advent of such websites as YouTube and Vimeo have changed the way of using films in education and language learning. There are a lot of available short clips on various topics for EFL lessons. Interviews, reality shows, news and scientific reports, short animated films can be harnessed for educational purposes. Developed by the British Film Institute(BFI) to facilitate film analysis, film is broken down into simple constituent parts: Camera, Colour and Character (3Cs), Story, Setting and Sound(3Ss). Analysing the individual elements that make up the moving image helps students to deconstruct and understand film content. The MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) *Teaching literacy through film* suggests teachers downloadable 3Cs and 3Ss prompt card and dice template. On each side of the dice is a symbol to represent one of the 3Cs or 3Ss, and the prompt card has a set of questions that correspond with each other. After viewing a film, every student can take turns rolling the dice, and asking questions from the corresponding prompt card. These tools can be used to initiate discussion on any type of film content. To develop writing skills and students' imagination the teacher can use only the sound of a film; students can close their eyes and visualise imaginative scenes. This experience of sound and visualisation stimulates creative writing. The prompt cards corresponding 3Cs and 3Ss can help them write a story. After this, students watch a film with sound and compare their imaginative story with the real one. One more useful tool to be used in the language learning process is filmmaking. It develops students' communication, team working skills and their creativity. Using mobile technology they can easily create their own video content. The teacher can give the students a story to read at home or in class and then asks them to record an interview with a character in the style of TV talk show (www.futurelearn.com). Even if these activities seem to be time consuming, teachers can also use websites with useful resources. For example, Kieran Donaghy has been writing lesson plans designed around short films for his website www.film-english.com where some lessons can be used for free. The

app Mooveez which transforms a film into an English lesson was the digital innovation of the year 2016 according to the British Council. Due to their ease of use, accessibility, interactivity, multimedial character, and reliability and security, web-technologies have a significant potential in shaping the intercultural competence of future specialists. They are helpful for:

− accelerating the pace of study and increasing the motivation for learning foreign languages and cultures, owing to visual presentation of educational material and strengthening its emotional component;

− ensuring the effectiveness of independent work by providing each student with the opportunity to choose the optimal method and pace of learning;

− improving the skills of productive intercultural interaction;

− providing the idea and understanding of network ethics, the ability to organize and conduct discussions on professional topics through participation in online communities, blogs, social networks, etc.;

− ensuring quick access to the information which a student is interested in *(Zhuk, 2006)*.

Conclusions and suggestions

The fast-paced development of digital technologies has changed our lives in the way we communicate, work and study. Modern technologies have impacted education offering a lot of opportunities to make the learning process more efficient. Since computers are actively used in language learning, teachers have a continual need to be tech-savvy and aware of new possibilities in education. Whether they like technology or not, EFL teachers should integrate it into their educational process, because technology plays a vital role in everyday professional life in which they need digital literacy skills for using different media and for keeping up with rapidly-growing professional world. Digital technologies enable us to transform the process of education. The use of electronic tools like laptop, tablet, video recording, audio recording, mobile, projector, interactive whiteboard, VR helps to develop language skills at a more intensive rate.

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