UDC 372.8

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THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Summary: *The article is devoted to the use of digital technology for teaching English as a foreign language. It considers certain elements of teachers' professional practice in the context of using digital technology for teaching English. It also analyses some of the affordances of technology for language education. It is provided an overview of the use of digital tools for teaching English as a foreign language.*

Key words: *digital skills, digital technology, digital tools, information and communications technology, teaching and learning English.*

Technology is very much part of language learning throughout the world at all different levels. It is possible to see traditional computers in labs, teachers and students walking around with laptops or tablet PCs, and many people will have a mobile phone that is capable of doing rather more than the mainframe computers that started computer-assisted language learning in the 1960s. What is still sometimes an issue is the reliability of these technologies for classroom use. It is argued that digital technologies are ideally placed to help teachers working with learners, and learners working independently, to complete the necessary tasks that make their language development possible [1].

When we talk about integrating information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching, we mean thinking about the best available tools for language teaching and learning. Writing on the board and using pens, pencils, paper and books may be the best tools for the job, but it is clear that digital skills are important for education and employment in the 21st century. This article will consider the use of ICT for language teaching and learning to emphasize the necessity of developing digital literacy and understand why ICT is important for teaching English as a foreign language.

To begin with, let us point out that ICT, or 'digital' technology, refers to online or internet use, e.g. communicating, creating and sharing information or multimedia texts. Digital media can include websites, electronic (or e-) books, software (email or anti-virus programmes), audio (MP3 or podcasts), video, video games, mobile media applications (or apps) and social media.

According to our research and work with teachers, it is possible to highlight the following elements of teachers' professional practice in the context of using digital technology for teaching English as a foreign language:

- Developing effective strategies for locating appropriate digital content. There are thousands of websites, apps and tools that help to teach and learn English. It can be difficult to find and choose which of these online spaces are most useful to teachers and their learners. Developing online search skills and strategies to help teachers locate digital content when they need it will save their time;

- Evaluating digital content, tools and platforms. When teachers find teaching resources online, it is important to understand if they are helpful to them and their learners. Knowing how to evaluate digital content to help teachers achieve different language learning aims will improve their lesson planning;

- Following guidelines for e-safety. It is necessary to control the personal information that people give when they use the internet. When teachers

ask their learners to use online content, it is their job as teachers to follow safety rules. E-safety guidelines will help to keep teachers and their learners safer online;

• Using technology in the production of teaching and learning materials. Different media can help teachers make language learning and teaching more engaging for their learners. Teachers and learners can develop language skills by making or using video and audio recordings, or combining text and image and sound. When they use technology to create their own digital content in English, it helps develop their 21st century skills;

• Promoting autonomous learning by exploiting digital content and technologies. One of the most important skills we all need to develop is learning how to learn in a better way. Teachers can help their students to develop 'learning to learn', and to become more independent learners. Designing digital tasks that link language learning in classes to learning at home will encourage autonomous, connected learning;

• Promoting collaborative and participatory learning by exploiting online communities, tools and platforms. English is often used in global, worldwide communication online. Teachers and their learners can practice communicating in English (e.g. reading and writing, speaking and listening, and sharing content) with others, wherever they live. When teachers encourage their learners to be active by being part of a safe online community, they will develop their language skills [2].

It is obvious that technology provides certain opportunities for teaching and learning English. The following list offers an overview of some of the affordances of technology for language education:

• Provides multimodal language activities in which reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are integrated, not isolated, thereby accommodating the strengths of different learners;

- Reduces language learning anxiety and increases motivation and participation;

- Enables learners to collaborate and build communities;

- Allows learners to construct a new social identity online which may give them confidence to interact with native speakers;

- Develops learner autonomy and allows learners to explore and engage in meaningful, authentic language practice with native speakers via computer-mediated communication tools such as texting, chats, e-mail, online discussions, blogging, wikis, and web-based word processing;

- Provides access to large collections of authentic language that can be used by teachers to create authentic learning activities;

- Enables computer-adaptive testing which improves test security and prevents cheating;

- Allows for real-time feedback on assessments;

- Enables automated feedback on written tasks via automated writing evaluation and chatbots, which can be created by teachers for text chat practice; also enables spoken feedback via automated speech recognition;

- Facilitates one-on-one language advising/language support between teachers and students via online access [3].

It is worth noting that with an increasing number of digital training tools available, it is difficult to choose the right ones for teaching and learning English. Teachers can make the best use of technology by developing their awareness of a range of digital technologies and considering carefully both how and why they can be used to support students' learning. Let us consider some popular digital tools that English teachers are able to use nowadays.

Zoom is a user-friendly video conference tool for online lessons. It has many innovative features that can help teachers to deliver engaging online lessons. Zoom's features allow teachers to explore and assess the four skills

through rich interactions with students. It is possible to present content in various ways. For example, teachers can prepare their own lessons or use an e-book and share their screen with the students. Zoom offers many useful tools to support teaching and learning such as screen sharing, recording features and a range of annotation tools. Screen sharing allows teachers to share digital material (including video and audio) with their students and recording lessons gives learners the opportunity to revisit the content at any time and at their own pace. The annotation tools allow teachers to really engage with their teaching and learning materials by drawing, writing and highlighting anything on the screen. This helps to make the learning both accessible and visually appealing. Zoom is a great tool for collaboration. Students can use the chat box with another learner, with the teacher or with the group. They can see everyone's camera and listen to everyone. Teachers can use the breakout rooms to group learners in pairs, threes or in whatever size group they want. It is a great way to encourage pair work or group work and allow learners to work independently. Zoom is a great conference platform for groups, and teachers can hold classes for up to 500 participants [4].

Google Classroom is a time-saving platform that allows teachers to combine the sharing of learning resources with the dynamics of a social network. This online platform is designed to manage workflow and communication between teachers and students. Teachers can create online classrooms, invite students to attend and create and share resources. Teachers and students can instantly communicate, and teachers can send announcements and start class discussions. Google Classroom is easy to access and manage from a computer, phone or laptop. Teachers can create a classroom, choose students to invite and share resources, post videos and add links. A simple menu allows teachers to choose whether to create assignments, questions, quick quizzes or share resources. It is possible to choose whether to send tasks and communications right away, schedule them for sending or save as a draft. When

students get a code from the teacher's invitation, they can see the class work on the class page together with due dates. Students can start their work by simply clicking the assignment then opening a Google Doc [5].

Quizlet is an efficient and engaging flashcard tool. It provides learners of all levels with the opportunity to memorise new words and phrases efficiently and in a fairly engaging way in and out of the classroom. It is a matter of common knowledge that reviewing vocabulary is an activity that learners do not always find the time or motivation for outside the classroom, and yet it is important for language learning. The ability to remember the meaning of a word is essential for the development of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Quizlet allows users to create flashcards to memorise and review vocabulary or topic content. They match language to text, images, sounds and video through games and activities. Once learners have their vocabulary set, they can complete a number of different study activities or games that help them to memorise the vocabulary, each with useful feedback on where they went wrong and what they got right. The *Learn* option is designed to recognize which items learners struggle with, and recycle them more often. By doing activities, learners can reflect on strengths and weaknesses, and set goals. They can identify progress which helps to build confidence [6].

LearningApps.org is a versatile tool for learners, teachers and teacher trainers who want to use or create a variety of different activities to practice the full range of language systems (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing). LearningApps.org is very easy to use with a walkthrough tutorial on the home page explaining all of the features. Teachers can create their own activities from scratch using one of the templates provided or they can adapt activities already created. LearningApps.org activities can be used with all levels of learners. There is a range of templates for simple language or skills focused activities. There are games and quizzes such as matching, identifying, categorising, gap-filling,

crosswords, filling in answers, ordering, putting things on a line and multiple-choice tasks. Teachers can also upload self-made or authentic texts, pictures, audio or video when creating or adapting activities. Feedback and hints can be added to help learners to get the right answers and to understand why their answer is right or wrong. Tasks can be completed individually and then shared or they can be done in pairs or groups in class or at home. Some LearningApps.org activities also have chat boxes where teachers and learners can add comments during games and there are some more sophisticated competitive tasks which learners can play in groups to compete with each other [7].

It should be noted that teachers have always tried to encourage learners to learn about things through language. Getting learners to do work about topics that are of interest to them, or topics that are taught in other parts of the curriculum (sometimes called Content and Language Integrated Learning or CLIL) is a great way to improve their skills. Technology makes this possible. Teachers and learners can go online to read or listen to material about different areas of interest, and can then write or speak about what they have discovered, telling others in the class or other classes elsewhere in the world. Trying to find ways for learners to do meaningful spoken language practice in a class can be very challenging. Linking one class to other classes around the world, using tools such as video conferencing, can give a reason for a learner to ask questions and then try to understand the response. It might also provide support for the teacher, too. The technology mediates the process, getting language out there and giving feedback that shows whether someone has or has not understood what learners have said [1].

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize that information and communications technology is changing the way people teach and learn English. It provides creative freedom, endless resources and learning materials, and the possibility to teach students from all corners of the globe. Integrating technology

into the curriculum not only provides students with the opportunity to expand their skills and succeed academically, it also prepares them for the real-world upon graduation. Teachers should use technology by developing their awareness of a range of digital tools and considering carefully both how and why they can be used to support students' learning. The consideration of what learning will be achieved and how the technology may help is fundamental to its effective deployment.

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