Approaches to the Use of Information Technology in Teaching Foreign Languages

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the role and advantages in using information technology (IT) in the process of teaching foreign languages in higher and secondary education, as well approaches to its use. The article discusses the definition and place of IT in the context of education and teaching, new opportunities in methodology, as well as requirements from both teachers and learners in using IT-based educational approaches. It also provides an analysis of possible challenges in applying IT in learning languages.

Keywords**:** Information technology, IT, Teaching, Language teaching, Methodology, Computer.

INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of information as a term, depending on the branch of science and the aim which we need to achieve. In general, information is considered to be the resolution of uncertainty; it is that which answers the question of "what an entity is" and is thus that which specifies the nature of that entity, as well as the essentiality of its properties. Information is associated with data and knowledge, as data is meaningful information and represents the values attributed to parameters, and knowledge signifies understanding of an abstract or concrete concept.

Information technology (IT) can be broadly defined as the use of computers, software (operating system/tools and applications), communications and networks to ensure that the information needs of an organization are met. (4, 41)

E.P. Ishchenko, A.A. Toporkov understand IT as "a set of hardware - technical means of management of information resources, a complex of software tools and organizational and methodological support". (6, 69)

Currently, society undergoes the process of informatization in almost all spheres. Informatization is a system of the following interrelated processes:

➢ informational - isolation and presentation of all socially significant information in a form accessible for storage, processing and transfer by electronic means;

➢ cognitive - the formation and preservation of a holistic information model of the world, allowing society to carry out proactive dynamic regulation of its development at all levels: from individual activity to the functioning of universal institutions;

➢ material - the construction of a global infrastructure of electronic means of storage, processing and transmission of information. (9, 17)

In terms of this work and its focus on methodology of language teaching, and teaching in general, information can be viewed as a crucial part of a learning process. It serves as a vitally

important, essential element in studying, because the study process itself cannot exist without information. Every day, a student learns and assimilates new information. It can come from many sources. Including teachers, course books, related study materials based on compulsory and out-of-class studies, both retrieved independently and with the help of peers and a teacher. This information needs to be digested and later used by the student. It can be applied in various ways: when solving tests, academic problems within case-study activities, project works, etc.

The purpose of this article is identification of IT, especially in the context of education and teaching foreign languages, analysis of its advantages in learning process and lesson development, as well as analysis of possible challenges in using IT in teaching.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article used introspective approach and author's personal experience in the setting of higher and previous secondary education teaching. It also used content analysis of the Internet and software, as well as pieces of research in methodology and foreign language teaching.

RESULTS

In an integrated world, information technology (further mentioned simply as IT) plays the main role in establishing connection between various parts of earth and providing people with effective collaborative process which gives significant results in various branches of life, including worldwide economics, business, science etc.

IT includes all technologies, both hardware and software that use, provide, and process many types of information for the benefits of both students and teachers.

Being important and inseparable part of our lives on a daily routine basis as never before, IT has significant influence on teaching as well. It can give teaching several opportunities and improvements, including:

a) high productivity. IT increases the speed and ergonomics of teaching process. Such facilities as diverse software can serve as an aid for the teacher to quickly create and use teaching material of any kind, including activities, tests, visual aids etc.;

b) quick and instant access to required material. The Internet, as well as local collaborative teachers' networks in educational institutions can be helpful in searching and finding new and innovative teaching resources including online tests, web-pages with activities, developed methodological complexes and tutorials written by a teacher etc.;

c) next level of teaching cooperation. IT relates directly to fruitful cooperation between people to reach a certain goal efficiently and quickly.

In case of education, IT can provide several types of such collaboration:

a) Student-teacher. Computers, smartphones together with their software and internet access can establish a stable network of such cooperation in many forms, including video-audio or instant messaging conference, organize such forms of educations as webinars, online lessons, lectures and seminars, online exams, consultations given by a teacher etc., both on a local or a broader level, if several educational institutions cooperate with each other using means of the Internet;

b) Teacher – Teacher. IT can be really helpful for teachers from various places to consult and discuss various important points of teaching, using online forums, dedicated web-sites, social networks etc.;

c) Student-student. IT provides students with opportunities to collaborate while making project works, pieces of research, course works etc.

Using IT and related software, as well as internet, is popular rand effective because of the following aspects:

a) Relation of study process with modern tendencies. There is no doubt that contemporary generation grew up with intensive presence of IT in everyday life. Today, there is barely no

chance to witness a teenager without a smartphone. Induction of IT on at least some extent into everyday study process creates a familiar atmosphere that young generation would certainly approve and feel eager to use;

b) Diversity of learning activities. IT can create endless forms of educational material, limited only by software and transferable skills of a teacher, including interactive software exercises and tests, digital coursebooks, video lessons, online and offline dictionaries etc.

We need to understand that IT, being an important aspect of teaching today, still remains an aspect, This should be a key word in teaching, and there are several requirements from both teachers and students to implement IT effectively. Let us view them via the prism of use of the most traditional information technologies as personal computers:

1) Teacher's personal transferable skills. IT use depends much on the age and computer science competence of a teacher. For example, it is much easier for a younger specialist to use IT in a class, while representatives of an older generation may experience problems with it, being not so familiar to the sphere. At the same time, a young teacher is often less experienced in methodology, and just the use of IT won't help him much to find an effective way to teach learners. It means that overall professional development and IT usage skills should be taken into consideration simultaneously. However, being young and familiar with IT doesn't provide with all its tools a teacher may have. Using software to create effective learning tools often requires some training, for example, creation of video lessons, interactive PC-based activities and establishing a local cooperation network about which we will talk later. At the moment, using of IT and overall computer literacy is considered to be one of compulsory criterions in assessing teacher's competence. (1)

2) Students' level of readiness to use IT correctly. Sometimes, IT can only distract students from a study process, especially when they have little to no experience of self-study skills, self-assessment and control. It may lead to misuse of IT, for example, personal computers, for their own purposes, especially if the IT-equipped class has little control. Such issues happen with young-aged students. Instead of focusing on a lesson's topic, students entertain themselves with the Internet or games, which is difficult to be managed and unacceptable. Therefore, students must have high sense of responsibility, self-control and other transferable skills to use IT for their study benefits.

Students are often eager to use this software actively in the classroom. It is usually created in an extremely intuitive, interactive and time-saving way so that the process of study and skills development is much easier, faster and enjoyable. It is, at most, obvious in online or offline official dictionaries published by McMillan or Cambridge. Moreover, the fact of social media popularity makes it possible for students to learn and develop skills in foreign language in direct verbal interaction with friends "online" form different countries. (7, 90)

There are several advantages of such form of dictionaries:

1. Time management. Because all the software dictionaries work on search engine principle, words can be easily found by typing them in search field.

2. Inclusion of other vocabulary-related material. Dictionaries can be enriched by illustrations, diagrams, pronunciation files students can refer to if the meaning of a word is unclear. In general. The use of IT makes study material more interactive, visual and has more elements of multimedia, which itself makes the study process more effective. (2, 309)

Computer technologies improve the quality of education, allow to satisfy and develop the cognitive interests of students, increase visualization of learning, help students overcome the psychological a barrier in the use of a foreign language as a means of communication. (10, 915)

3. Physical advantages. Software dictionaries can be installed on many devices, and taken anywhere. They do not occupy much space on computers, and in comparison with heavyweight paper dictionaries, easy to be carried, especially if installed on smartphones.

Another way to use software for strictly educational purposes are interactive exercises and games. There are plenty of websites and services that develop certain language skills, including smartphone-based ones. Programs like DuoLingo or LinguaLeo proved themselves to be a rather effective way of step-by-step skills development in all the linguistic areas possible – speaking, writing, spelling, vocabulary, phonetics, etc. These programs are especially useful for beginner learners or those who study another foreign language alongside English for comparative scientific research.

For teachers, there are programs developed for control and progress check, for instance, Hot Potatoes or MyTest. This software is designed to help the teacher create and use progress check materials either on computer or in a traditional way.

Working with such software requires some IT skills form the teacher. However, considering an intuitive graphic interface of these programs and tutorials included, this doesn't present itself as a serious obstacle to use them in everyday teaching practice.

Vocabulary and speaking skills of students may also be monitored and enriched by such smartphone applications like Orphic. This application is a constantly updated database of interesting, new, stylistically significant and rare English words. These words can be delivered to a student daily one day at a time in the form of notification while the phone is online. Later, these finding for a student can be discussed and presented, which can extend the lesson and add an unusual but useful moment to it.

Writing skills are one of the most difficult ones to be taught to students in the classroom. It is a regular situation when the student is reluctant to writing or has issues with stylistics, accuracy, structure of sentences, focus of his writing, keeping the topic etc. It is important to encourage students to write even outside studies, for pleasure, to develop creative thinking and imagination.

For example, it is a good idea to suggest students to write fiction, let it be prose or poetry. To make this writing meaningful, teachers can suggest students to post their works online, for example, using blog services or special fiction writing websites like WattPad, where they can post their works and read others. These works can be rated. Therefore, students may become encouraged to write more, knowing that they could share their works.

The use of IT enlarges the boundaries of educational process, improves practical aspect of teaching, acts as motivation for students, promotes the development of intellectual and creative potential of students. (5, 287)

The high involvement of IT in everyday lives all over the world and constant, exponent increase in the Internet access and its speed created an atmosphere in which one cannot imagine a day without IT.

The use of IT, according to the analysis of new pedagogical research (incl. Ia. A. Vagramenko, A. A. Kuznetsov, E. I. Mashbits, E. S. Polat, I. V. Robert, V. V. Rubtsov, O. K. Tikhomirov) makes it possible to conclude that the level of autonomous, creative learning and access to new study material depend on the access to IT. (11, 29)

Computers also have a great assistance in control of the study and time management, and help in assessment of academic performance in the most objective way. (8, 20) PCs, being highly interactive, can serve as a "perfect" tool for individual approach in learning. (3, 208)

Using IT's sources and achievements, people solve everyday tasks, fulfill various work responsibilities, approach and learn new information, use it as a source of entertainment and creativity, collaborate and keep in touch with colleagues, relatives etc.

CONCLUSION

In the classroom, information technology is a helpful tool for a teacher. Its presence is compulsory and can be realized in all the possible subject taught, no matter what level of education is taken into account. However, there are some moments when use of IT can be limited or difficult owing to various issues to which we need to pay attention to:

1. IT competence of a teacher. Does the teacher have enough skills to work with information technology? Can he quickly work with its software and tools, including computers and projectors? Teachers should have overall knowledge of computer literacy to use IT advantages effectively.

2. Accessibility of IT among students. For some students it can appear difficult to use IT like phones or notebooks because of various reasons, from financial to personal. It should be taken into account thoroughly when giving any IT-related task and assignments.

3. Accessibility of the Internet. There are still some areas and regions where the Internet is not accessible, and therefore, such functions like using online dictionaries, services or cloud storage are practically impossible or extremely difficult.

4. Dependence on operating system. Today, hardware is equipped with various operating system software, which may result in both slightly or completely different functions. For instance, many older operating systems including Symbian and Windows XP no longer support functions realized in contemporary ones.

5. Hardware requirements. HD videos in the class are not possible to be played on more technically modest devices that do not have enough memory.

6. IT as distraction. Some students use IT for entertainment purposes, surfing the Internet and using messaging instead of focusing on the lesson. It should be noted that gadgets like smartphones and tablets serve as study tools and not as means of communication! Therefore, exploitation of such hardware must be strictly controlled.

7. IT as ways of cheating. The same functions of smartphones like dictionaries, online educational services can become convenient and inconspicuous prompts for the student. When the time comes to check the progress, the use of these devices should be limited or even banned.

8. Students own competence in using IT. Some learners are either too young or not ready to use all feature of It teachers may offer them. The age group, discipline and computer literacy should be taken into account.

These factors need to be revised while organizing a lesson if the teacher wants to include working with any information technology. Otherwise, the lesson and its related IT based tasks have a high possibility to fail and won't give any fruitful outcome. It is up to the teacher to what extent to use IT and means of t he wants to choose either in or out of the classroom.

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