

Benefits of Using Technologies in the English Language Classroom

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The necessity of technology use in the foreign languages teaching

As we are moving deeper into the digital age, it is obvious that the power of technology influences our daily lives as well as makes huge changes in the field of education. Nowadays incorporation of new technologies into the process of teaching is considered essential and for the recent two decades this topic remains in the center of teaching experts attention.

An English language teaching expert Ozge Karaoglu in her recent study explores two terms: “*digital natives*” – young people who have grown up in a digital, media-saturated world; and “*digital immigrants*” – teachers, who were not born into this technology and were forced to learn it. The expert states: “Ironically, as “digital immigrants”, teachers are actually the ones responsible for teaching the “digital natives” to be powerful and savvy users of technology”. The good news is that young people are usually quick learners, so there is a path to do this successfully; it just requires that we also become teachers of digital literacy in addition to our core subject(s). In this light, it is critical that teachers adapt their lesson plans to ensure that enough time and effort is devoted to navigating the technology, and these plans need to include learning outcomes specific to this effort. Schools, and particularly IT departments, need to support teachers who take this initiative, and teachers across the different subjects should discuss how to collaborate on digital literacy lessons. As we integrate technology, effective classroom management becomes even more key for successful learning outcomes. (“The bionic wunderkind in brief”, Ozge Karaoglu, page 14)

Another English teaching professional, Anna Roslaniec also pointed out the importance of technology in her article “Seven essential 21st century skills for secondary learners teaching”. The author named *Critical Thinking; Communication; Collaboration; Creativity, Cultural Awareness, Digital Literacy and Autonomy* as the key skills for today's learners. She advises to develop *Digital literacy* by incorporating smartphones into the classes to research projects, checking definitions of words or playing interactive quizzes. “Use interactive whiteboard or projectors to show authentic videos or have students make their own.. It is also crucial that we

encourage learners to use technology safely, educate them on the potential dangers they face online and teach them about what information or websites they can trust. (“21st century learning skills”, Anna Roslaniec)

Blended learning methodology

Necessity for using technology in the teaching process resulted in introducing *Blended learning* approach. “*Blended learning, brick and click, tailored learning*” are the terms used for describing this approach. “*The brick*” is the traditional classroom setting. The traditional setting promotes a social and cooperative learning environment. It motivates learners through peer interactions and immediate teacher feedback. It allows both teachers and students to address questions and confusions as they arise. “*The click*” is the autonomous learning environment available through the web. Web-based tools allow learners to practice and acquire new language skills without classroom distractions, as well as self-direct their learning. Merging these two worlds together creates an environment that meets a variety of learning styles and a variety of both student and teacher needs. This merge is referred to as *blended learning*. (Why blended learning may be just what you have been looking for, Cristina Cavage, page 1)

Blended learning brings three main benefits to the modern classroom:

- Enriched Learning through Student Engagement

Following a blended learning model can increase learning by over 11% compared to that in a traditional classroom (Siltzmann, Ely 2009). Outside the classroom, students can interact with content at their own pace, according to their own schedule, receive reinforcement of course content and self-select exercises and activities.

- Informed Teaching: A Clear Picture of Progress

Using a blended learning approach allows teachers to be more informed about students’ successes and failures. Teachers can choose the most appropriate activities and customize course content to meet curricular and programmatic demands.

- Flexible Solutions through Customized Content

A high-quality tool is an interactive, engaging learning management system that allows teachers to alter, show or hide content. They can delete activities or entire chapters that they don’t need or don’t meet their learning outcomes. (Blending with Purpose, 2009)

MyEnglishLab tool for Blended learning

Among a huge variety of tools for blended learning in global academic society, one of the most powerful is considered to be *MyEnglishLab*. *MyEnglishLab* is a customized digital language management system. It

delivers to teachers the course content online, with the added benefits of automated marking and extra support for students. As students complete homework, they receive extra hints and tips to encourage and support learning. *MyEnglishLab* saves time with automatic marking and provides exposure to course content in one place, simultaneously providing easy online class management and mark export. Studies have shown that using this on-line learning platform can help improve student results. From motivating students to helping manage mixed-ability classes, *MyEnglishLab* makes a positive impact on learning outcomes. It can be used on desktop computers, tablets and mobile phones, at home or at school, and can be integrated with systems like Moodle, Blackboard and Canvas.

In Lithuania *MyEnglishLab* has been widely used by the state and private teaching institutions since 2011. *Teachers' professional development programme*, aimed at providing teacher-training events on the use of languages teaching materials with *MyEnglishLab* tool, was created and carried out by *Pearson* representative office in cooperation with regional education centres across the country. As a result of these professional training series, the number of teachers and educational institutions using this blended learning tool has been steadily increasing.

In the recent research carried out by *Pearson* representative office for the Baltic countries, a high number of teachers of the English language indicated that acquiring the language using such teenage courses as *Focus and Wider World* with *MyEnglishLab*, helped them achieve better learning outcomes. According to the teachers, studying from the courses supported by *MyEnglishLab* platform, students are more engaged and become even more independent learners, taking responsibility and control of their own learning process. Teachers using general adult *Speakout* course with BBC material, as well as business English course *Market Leader* and grammar course *MyGrammarLab*, revealed that implementing online platform saves a lot of time, too. Before integrating the technology, they would spend a significant amount of time creating practice activities, worksheets, homework exercises, custom handouts and PowerPoint slides. Whereas with this tool, teachers focus their time only on assigning already existing bank of activities to students. Students work at their own pace. While some may need the entire one-hour lab session to complete an activity, those who finish earlier can continue moving forward in *MyEnglishLab*. (*Myenglishlab*, case studies)

Conclusion:

After analyzing the recent tendencies in the English languages teaching in Lithuania and abroad, it can be concluded that the use of innovations in today's process of learning is essential for meeting modern high-quality education needs. Digital literacy is considered one of the key 21st century's learner's skills and needs to be developed appropriately. Incorporating technology into the process of teaching and learning is beneficial for both: teachers and students. By using an online learning platform such as *MyEnglishLab* teachers receive irreplaceable support in teaching, ensure that students are provided enough time and effort to navigate the technology itself and develop their digital literacy skills, as well as assure successful learning outcomes at a higher level.

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