The Ꭱole of Educational Apps in Language Teaching and Learning Processes

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Abstract

Having intruded in every sphere of our life modern technology brought tremendous changes that revolutionized the way we live, work, communicate and study. Not surprisingly, educational process which involves progressive, technology-oriented youth couldn't remain unaffected, and integration of ICT in education has become a crucial and inseparable part of teaching and learning processes. Keeping the attention of a student while teaching may seem difficult at times, but not when you include technology into your curriculum. By working with technology, using some of the educational apps educators may effectively enhance the learning process adding a new dimension to teaching. Besides, it may offer students a break from the traditional classroom, still reinforcing the skills they are learning.

In this article we make an attempt to concentrate on the role of technology for language teaching and learning, studying some of the educational apps that can make this process more efficient.

Key word: educational apps, ICT, learning process, language teaching and learning

Роль информационных технологий и образовательных приложений в обучении языку

Резюме

За последние годы стремительное развитие информационных технологий внесло изменения во все сферы нашей жизни. Вполне закономерно, что образовательный процесс охватывающий прогрессивную, технологически-ориентированную молодежь не мог остаться незатронутым. К тому же, будучи все более и более увлечённой технологиями, молодежь в какой -то мере утратила интерес к традиционным аудиторным занятиям.

В связи с этим, преподавателям ESP необходимо срочно отреагировать на данные изменения и адаптировать обучение языку согласно современным требованиям. Статистически доказано, что интеграция информационных технологий в обучение языку, наряду с основной программой ведет к повышению мотивации и интереса учащихся улучшая восприятие материала. Особую роль в этом процессе могут играть специальные образовательные приложения, направленные на развитие тех или иных навыков языка. Данная статья ставит своей целью рассмотрение и сравнение некоторых популярных приложений направленных на изучение языка для дальнейшего их применения в аудитории и улучшения восприятия и мотивации студентов.

Ключевые слова: обучение языку, образовательные приложения, информационные технологии, образовательный процесс, применение технологий

Ինտերնետային Հաղորդակցման Տեխնոլոգիաների և կրթական հավելվածների դերը լեզվի ուսուցման գործընթացում

ԱԲՍՏՐԱԿՏ

Վերջին տասնամյակներում Ինտերնետային Հաղորդակցման Տեխնոլոգիաները դարձել են դասավանդման գործընթացի անբաժանելի և կարևորագույն մաս: Ժամանակակից տեխնոլոգիաները ներխուժել են մարդկային գործունեության գրեթե բոլոր ոլորտներ` ունենալով անմիջական ազդեցություն կրթության ոլորտի վրա նույնպես: XXI դարում պարզապես անհնարին է պատկերացնել որևէ ուսումնական հաստատություն, որևէ լսարան, որտեղ չեն օգտագործվում համակարգիչներ, ժամանակակից սարքավորումներ և համակարգչային հավելվածներ, մեր հողվածի շրջանակներում մասնավորապես կրթական հավելվածներ: Ինտերնետային Հաղորդակցման Տեխնոլոգիաների և համակարգչային հավելվածների կիրառումը լսարանում առավելագույնս նպաստում է ուսանողների լեզվական մակարդակի բարձրացմանը` դասը դարձնելով ավելի արդյունավետ և հետաքրքիր, խթանում է ուսանող-դասախոս փոխհարաբերությունները և նպաստում է ուսանողների ստեղծագործական մտքի խորացմանը: Սույն հոդվածը նպատակ ունի ներկայացնել մի քանի արդյունավետ կրթական հավելվածներ, ընտրված բազմաթիվ հավելվածներից արկա համաձայնցում, որոնք փորձարկվել են տարբեր ֆակուլտետներում, տարբեր մակարդակներ ունեցող ուսանողների հետ և ապացուցել իրենց արդյունավետությունն ու անհրաժեշտությունը:

Բանալի բառեր ` Ինտերնետային Հաղորդակցման Տեխնոլոգիաներ, կրթական հավելվածներ, լեզվի ուսուցում, կրթական գործընթաց, տեխնոլոգիաների կիրառում

The integration of ICT in education has become a crucial and inseparable part of teaching and learning processes especially in the last decades. Modern technologies intruded into all spheres of human activity, having their immediate impact on education as well. When the process of integration of ICT into language teaching has just started, some specialists and experts in the field of linguistics were not fully convinced that it could have positive effect and good results due to overwhelming and sometimes unreliable and even misleading influx of internet information. With the time and practice, they realized that the introduction of ICT is simply inevitable in the 21st century, and it is impossible not to use various gadgets, computers and smart phones in the classroom. Moreover, it became clear that if proper applications are used in the classroom, the process of foreign language acquisition becomes more effective, the students start to have high motivation for learning, they don't get bored at the end of the lesson and become more and more creative.

In this article we make an attempt to concentrate on the role of technology for language teaching and learning, studying some of the educational apps that can make this process more efficient. This significantly promotes teacher and student confidence with ICT [1]. Although there is still unequal access to technology throughout the world [2], evidently it increases day by day, and almost every school, educational and social institution has an access to the Internet, and most of the students possess either a smartphone, laptop or other digital gadget.

It goes without saying that traditional time-tested methods of language teaching have been tested for a long period of time and are regarded as highly effective and successful, but that doesn't mean that they should be the only tools used in the classroom. In order to go hand in hand with the globalized world and keep up with the demands of contemporary language teaching, it is not only desirable, but also compulsory to integrate ICT and different educational applications into the curriculum. The most difficult, but at the same time the most crucial point is which apps to incorporate and how to deal with them using each as cross-curricular tool [3]. It is well-known that each field of study, each group of students is unique in its type and it is the teacher's duty to choose appropriate, suitable apps for this or that classroom which will improve teacher-student interaction, enhance students' motivation making them more creative, flexible and compatible in this digitalized world. According to Rasool "Each situation demands a specific approach to language learning, and these circumstances dictate not only when technologies are introduced to young learners, but how they are implemented. It is also apparent that whilst technology has the power to utterly transform learning, there are occasions when

it can actually serve to reinforce linguistic, social and cultural hegemonies, rather than challenging them"[4]. Practitioners frequently comment on how ICTs facilitate collaboration whilst also offering the potential for personalized, scaffolded learning [5].

A great number of educational apps have been created which can be used on Windows, Android or IOS platforms, they can have quite different formats and can be used for various goals. From endless influx of information present in the Internet we selected and distinguished the following applications which have been approbated in different faculties with students of different levels of proficiency. These include UNLOCK, NEWSMART, TED-ED and HOT POTATOES. Some of these applications are in ready-to-use formats, which make the job of the teacher much easier, because the students are just asked to make the right option from already existing assignments directed at the development of all four skills. From this row the first two applications, i.e. UNLOCK and NEWSMART are very effective and popular for their flexibility. UNLOCK is an application worked out by Cambridge University Press which provides fresh, informative videos from Discovery Education motivating students to have hot discussions, improving their academic skills and enhancing their critical thinking. Besides, it strongly helps to improve students listening skills. The most valuable thing about this app is that it offers a wide list of online workbooks starting from beginners to advanced level students, where they can choose their preferable course book either in British or American English.

NEWSMART is an application that is designed particularly for students interested in Business English. It uses daily updated information from Wall Street Journal, develops reading and listening skills and focuses on mainly thematic vocabulary development. Moreover, it makes mastering business English engaging and fun and also offers user-friendly text and video format. By using these apps students can enjoy vast amount of online trust-worthy information.

The above-mentioned apps actually provide ready-made lessons for multiple-level learners. However, it's impossible to modify the content to fit the curriculum of a certain course. Fortunately, there also exist apps by means of which it is possible to modify and customize the lessons to meet specific needs of students, curriculum requirements, etc, which plays a vital role especially for ESP teaching. TED-ED is one of the most popular apps offering intriguing and enthralling ready-to-use video lessons that can be easily tailored to serve a particular classroom. TED-ED platform with its growing library of captivating and thought-provoking videos can either be used in their original format or be modified or tailored by the educators to fit their own lessons by uploading videos from YouTube and complementing them with several types of tasks. Any creative thinker, visionary and teacher can make a contribution to foster the spread of ideas. It also offers teachers a wide range of intriguing materials that can be adjusted to their goals.

Amid so many educational apps that can be modified for language learning and can really spark curiosity and explore students' skills, there are programs offering certain formats for creating a lesson from a scratch. One such app is a Hot Potatoes platform, which has proven to be rather effective and practical especially for language learning. It was developed at TESL department of the University of Victoria by the Research and Development team, becoming accessible as free software in 2009 and gaining approval among such English language software programs like MOODLE. The program offers online and offline exercises in 6 different applications: JClose, JCross, JMatch, JMIX, JQuiz, and recently added The Masher. By means of the latter it is possible to combine all Hot Potato apps into a single unit. Designed especially for foreign language learning, it enables teachers to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises that can be shared by the World Wide Web. Teachers can set tasks that automatically develop the webpages for students, ready to be uploaded to their server by simply adding necessary content-based data and compiling exercises through this user-friendly application,.

The first type of application called JQuiz creates multiple choice answer quizzes. It can include a written text that teachers may select according to their needs and a set of questions with four answer choice options. There is an option of providing a feedback which may guide the learners towards the right answer. It can also provide short answer, hybrid or multi-select quizzes. Multiple -choice quizzes have become an indispensable tool in modern language teaching and are included almost in all internationally accepted testing formats such as TOEFL, IELTS and others. Therefore, if teachers

develop the quizzes that correspond to their requirements and the level of their students they can gradually prepare students to the real test challenges by assessing students' mastery of details and specific language knowledge. The Multiple-choice quizzes can also be used to measure both simple and complex concepts. Most importantly, a well- structured Multiple-choice quiz that offers academic value will not merely indicate if the student's answer is right or wrong, it will go further by clearly explaining the reasons why each answer was right or wrong ensuring the continuation of the learning process. All these goals can easily be achieved through JQuiz application.

The second application JMix produces jumbled-sentence exercises. Here several acceptable alternatives may be set by the teacher.There is also the hint button which will provide students with the next correct word or a segment of a sentence if needed. These types of exercises are a very interesting way to enable students to practice and understand correct sentence formation which improves their fluency and proficiency.

JCross is the next application of the HOT Potatoes platform with the help of which the teachers can easily create crossword puzzles of any size to consolidate vocabulary of the unit. The clues can be entered either in the form of word or pictures and the option of hint button is also available. Undoubtedly, the educational possibilities of word puzzles are quite obvious. First of all, it involves several useful skills including vocabulary, reasoning, spelling, identifying and understanding the terms being used. This in its turn leads to acquiring new vocabulary or terminology and can involve making differentiations between similar words or phrases. Deciphering a crossword also requires exact spelling, which imply practicing dictionary skills. Other important skills required for completing these puzzles include making inferences, evaluating choices and drawing conclusions. However, even realizing these benefits, educators may find it really challenging and time consuming to create puzzles based on the curriculum they are covering. The applications like this one, in contrast, provide educators with an opportunity to create puzzles geared to their students' particular subject.

JMatch is the application that can generate both ordering and matching exercises. Students are required to match the list of fixed items (pictures, words or phrases) on the left with the jumbled items to the right. Through these exercises students can learn grammar and vocabulary in an interactive, less threatening and more game-like way.

JCloze is the final application of the platform that creates gap-filling exercises. Gap-fill exercises are an excellent way to recycle vocabulary through different contexts and can be used to broaden the student's understanding of the range of meanings. The online format of the exercises allows students to get immediate feedback on their answers. Like the previous apps this one also allows educators to create a unique, need-based task within several minutes.

Undoubtedly the most expedient feature of the program is the Masher application which can integrate all Hot Potatoes exercises into one whole unit. It can also be used to upload web pages not created by means of Hot Potatoes to the www.hotpotatoes.net server. In addition, color pattern and navigation buttons, the size and the font can be arranged and modified.

Hot Potatoes app ensures prompt and immediate feedback to every single question. The program is not restricted to one particular language and can function similarly for other languages. A further benefit is that any creative language instructor is able to post a Hot Potatoes file and bring out the tests or send them to students and obtain the final results on the web in a safe and reliable way. Using the latest versions of Hot Potatoes allows the user to post quizzes to any online module created for this purpose like a class web blog.

With the help of these applications the educators may create and post tests online, receive students' files and return the results at their convenience. Most importantly, Hot Potatoes apps enable the option of including audio-visual materials on the website which is principal for the development of educational contents concurrently leading to increased student motivation.

Being the fastest growing tool for language learning, apps have become a prevailing way for learning new vocabulary and improving skills on the go. Rapidly improving apps comprise more features from pronunciation to grammar checking, to listening comprehension and serious project work. These innovative methods are growing in force, but provide a more comfortable way for learners to dive into a language, offering strong insights and helping to build language skills.

Being objective it should be noted that there doesn't exist any ideal app suitable for every situation and intended to instantaneously improve all language skills. Unquestionably, Hot Potatoes can perfectly serve to develop grammar and vocabulary, improve reading comprehension, however, it doesn't offer enough student interaction and communication. The apps like UNLOCK and TED-Ed are serious tools to substantially improve student listening and speaking proficiency, develop their analytical and critical thinking skills, at the same time broadening their minds and making them more aware of the issues going on in the world. Those interested in business English can benefit from NEWSMART app.

A really motivated educator should never focus on any single application, but try to integrate all of them along with the main content-based course book enhancing all this with Power Point presentations, case study activities, student research project work and other Web 2 tools such as blogs, forums and wikis. Multimedia and interactivity make learning more entertaining. A process that encompasses images, sound and video can be much more effective and motivating making it possible to learn while having fun. This makes both teachers and students increasingly inventive giving students an opportunity to write or speak for wider audiences, shifting from classroom to international audience, providing an opportunity to communicate in a real–life setting, thus, improving their language competence and cultural awareness. Only integrating the new along with the old can we receive productive feedback, keep up with 21th century demands and hold student motivation at its top molding from them successful individuals in this competitive, continuously technologically-updated world.

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