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INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Abstract: This article examines contemporary approaches to foreign language instruction and argues for their relevance in technical higher education institutions. Teaching English in non-linguistic universities presents specific challenges, such as varying levels of language proficiency among first-year students, limited class hours dedicated to language learning, diverse class sizes, and low motivation to study a foreign language. Motivation is identified as a crucial factor in the educational process, and fostering motivation among students in technical universities is seen as a key objective. The study suggests that the effectiveness of language classes can be significantly enhanced by aligning the content of the "foreign language" discipline with the professional needs of technical universities. It is observed that interactive learning technologies, including cognitive-communicative and constructivist methods, can be effectively utilized in teaching foreign languages. The research supports the idea that the integration of innovative approaches, such as multimedia teaching tools, in English language instruction can enhance student motivation, provide access to alternative information sources, foster independent thinking, and develop communication skills, as well as cultural and professional competence.

Key words: Language learning, higher education, innovation, technology.

Language: English

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Introduction

In contemporary academic and business contexts, English has become the primary means of international communication. Proficiency in English is considered a prerequisite for future engineers, as it enables them to effectively engage in daily, professional, and business interactions, and equips them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Extensive research and scholarly literature have explored innovative educational technologies, improved methods of teaching foreign languages, and enhanced language skills for engineering and technical personnel in both Uzbek and international contexts.

Foreign language education in non-linguistic higher education institutions, particularly technical universities, has always been a critical issue. Teaching English for technical disciplines presents distinct characteristics, such as varying levels of initial English proficiency among first-year students, limited class hours dedicated to language instruction, and variations in group sizes. However, the pressing concern in the present context is to enhance students' motivation to study English in technical universities. Addressing this issue necessitates the utilization of modern innovative information technologies in the teaching process of higher technical education, which serves as the focal point of our research.

The objective of this article is to analyze and elucidate the content of contemporary innovative teaching technologies that contribute to increased motivation in mastering foreign languages and, consequently, foster the development and self-realization of students within the "foreign language" discipline in technical higher education institutions.

Education innovations involve the creation, implementation, and dissemination of novel ideas, approaches, techniques, methods, and technologies

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that aim to update, modernize, and transform the educational process in line with contemporary requirements. Information technologies have emerged as an indispensable tool in modern teaching practices and represent a crucial component of an innovative approach to teaching university students in general, and foreign languages in particular.

The primary responsibilities of teachers in the academic disciplines of "English" and "English in the professional direction" encompass ensuring the attainment of a suitable level of foreign language proficiency among students in alignment with the requirements of the state educational standard. Additionally, teachers play a vital role in the educational and developmental aspects of students through the utilization of English, which is facilitated by engaging in scientific, organizational, and methodological work.

Traditional classroom instruction, characterized by passive reception of information from the teacher, is often replaced by more interactive approaches. In the era of technology, classrooms are equipped with a wide array of tools that enhance the effectiveness of second language teaching, alleviate monotony, and move beyond relying solely on textbooks. This article focuses on the theoretical presentation of six such tools: whiteboards, smartphones, Skype, blogs, podcasts, and online games, which we believe have significantly transformed the teaching and learning of English. In the research component, we aim to identify the popularity of these tools among English teachers, as well as their willingness to experiment with new technologies. Furthermore, we seek to understand the perspectives and experiences of English students. Additionally, a comparative analysis is conducted to examine any discrepancies in the selection of technological innovations between English teachers and primary and secondary school students.

English language instruction is continually evolving in response to technological advancements. However, which technological innovations have had the most profound impact on English teaching? This study focuses on six selected innovations that are considered particularly influential. One such innovation is smartphones, which are widely owned devices found in the possession of nearly every individual worldwide. Smartphones, especially popular among the younger generation, are utilized not only for communication but also for photography, gaming, and accessing various applications. Some of these applications serve as both entertaining and educational resources, covering general and specialized knowledge, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and spoken language practice.

One application specifically designed for classroom use is a free, teacher-accessible platform that allows for the creation of a shared virtual space accommodating up to 50 students per session.

Through this platform, teachers can generate tests with time limits, assess results, and receive feedback and insights from students. This engaging and enjoyable method enables students to assess their knowledge without requiring an internet connection; all they need is a charged battery and access to the Google Play store.

Another application, Wordable, is a social English vocabulary game based on the Cambridge Dictionary. It offers word games that make vocabulary learning enjoyable, enabling children to acquire approximately 3,000 commonly used English words across various categories such as news, school, sports, work, and travel. It also includes 1,500 essential words related to business, construction, food, household items, retail, and more. Wordable fosters social interaction by allowing users to compete with friends and students worldwide. Additionally, it employs wordable memory technology to expedite the learning process. Tri Pro English, exclusively designed for tablets and mobile phones, offers English language exams at three levels: Easy, Intermediate, and Advanced. The exercises encompass a diverse range of listening classes for students at levels B1, B2, and C2. Each listening segment is accompanied by comprehension questions, providing students with the opportunity to assess their understanding of the text. An advantage of this application is its accessibility anywhere and anytime, even without an internet connection. It is available for download from the App Store on mobile phones and tablets and can be utilized for individual study or integrated into lessons with a teacher.

Fluent U is a distinctive application that features live videos, including news, cartoons, music videos, commercials, and inspirational conversations. It offers an unconventional approach to language learning, allowing students to engage with English as it is spoken in real-life contexts. Fluent U contains a vast collection of authentic English materials, captivating students by incorporating their favorite videos into the learning process. The videos are categorized according to skill levels and are accompanied by integrated language lessons. This application serves not only as a resource for teachers in curriculum development but also as a valuable tool for students during classroom activities or independent study. It is particularly recommended for teachers seeking to incorporate engaging content, especially for students who respond well to audiovisual materials. The application is available for free download from the App Store, offering flexibility for classroom activities, group projects, and individual assignments.

Google Translate is an indispensable application for individuals engaged in foreign language study or instruction. Its capabilities extend beyond English, as it supports translation into a wide range of languages, making it applicable to various language-related activities. It is extensively utilized by individuals

traveling abroad, during international trips, or when working on projects outside the classroom. However, caution must be exercised when relying on the program for translating entire sentences. Students should be mindful of its word-by-word translation configuration, as this can lead to misunderstandings or incorrect interpretations.

The integration of interactive whiteboards (IWBs) provides teachers with ample opportunities to foster student engagement. Given that most students are visual learners, utilizing colors, pictures, and images to organize, categorize, and explore information can enhance the existing curriculum. IWBs facilitate the incorporation of videos, interactive diagrams, narratives, and online content, thereby augmenting student interest and complementing the established curriculum. Moreover, since IWBs function as digital tools and are powered by electricity, teachers must be prepared to adapt and find alternative methods to sustain an interesting and innovative learning environment should an unexpected power outage occur.

Despite being introduced 15 years ago in 2003, Skype remains a valuable technological tool for English language instruction. It offers a simple and cost-effective means for students and teachers to engage in communication with the wider world without leaving their seats. By utilizing Skype in language classes, students can connect with native English speakers from different regions, thereby enhancing their English language skills. The learning experience becomes more authentic, inspiring, and engaging when it extends beyond the confines of the classroom. Skype can facilitate diverse authentic language encounters, including interviews with English authors or collaborative projects with other classes worldwide. Furthermore, it is not solely limited to developing speaking skills; the instant messaging and chat features are advantageous for students seeking to enhance their writing and reading abilities. While Skype may be considered less sophisticated than other web or video conferencing tools, its simplicity renders it accessible for teachers who may exhibit hesitancy due to limited technological proficiency, confidence, or apprehension.

When selecting specific teaching methods, instructors must adhere to certain criteria and establish achievable objectives, including:

Analyzing students' language needs based on their chosen field of study.

Emphasizing practical language usage.

Focusing on language learning within authentic foreign language materials and environments.

Equipping students with conversational skills on professional topics and fostering their ability to develop independent projects.

These teaching objectives should be realized through the application of various techniques, approaches, and methodologies. Among these, the communicative method proves to be highly effective as it introduces activities such as brainstorming, role-playing games, and problem-based scenarios. The role-playing method compels students to tackle diverse challenges, thereby fostering appropriate forms of oral communication. The problem-based scenario approach is grounded in real-life examples, encouraging students to independently generate problem situations and collaboratively search for solutions.

The content and methodology employed in foreign language instruction should align with students' actual interests and needs, mirroring the real-life environment as closely as possible. To achieve this, foreign language instructors should demonstrate an active interest in students' fields of study and stay informed about the latest advancements in relevant domains. Maintaining close communication with instructors in specialized disciplines is essential to identify current issues and topics relevant to students' future professions.

The educational system prepares engineers not only for immediate employment but also for their long-term careers, which are inherently unpredictable. Consequently, the selection and justification of educational content, including foreign language studies, should possess a predictive function. This entails that instructors of each academic discipline should guide students not only towards narrowly utilitarian language proficiency but also towards effectively utilizing the knowledge, skills, and abilities they acquire in future endeavors. Moreover, instructors should instill in students a strong inclination and internal drive for continuous self-learning, self-education, and self-improvement throughout their professional journey.

An in-depth examination of contemporary approaches has identified multimedia integration, discourse-based instruction, online communication, interactive methodologies, competency-based approaches, and the promotion of continuous English language use (both inside and outside the classroom) as crucial aspects. Let us delve into these key approaches in greater detail.

Multimedia integration: Modern methods of teaching English in higher education institutions are heavily reliant on multimedia tools. The utilization of multimedia for didactic purposes encompasses two primary directions. Firstly, multimedia is employed for independent student work, such as watching films, engaging with online courses, and utilizing self-study programs in English. Secondly, multimedia serves as communication support, acting as a primary tool for acquiring foreign language competencies. This includes group viewing and listening to English-language materials, followed by subsequent discussion within small groups. Additionally, multimedia supports individual or group projects,

enabling students to present their work in the classroom, among other activities.

When considering multimedia holistically, its versatility extends beyond specialized educational content. It can contribute to foreign language acquisition within extracurricular virtual spaces, encompassing activities such as job searches, international internships, submitting resumes, engaging in online communication in a foreign language, and creating dedicated language-learning groups. Encouraging students to establish an extracurricular connection to technological devices allows for increased exposure to English-language communication through appropriate guidance.

Multimedia occupies a significant portion of educational materials, while the Internet should be viewed not only as a tool for accessing educational content but also as an environment that facilitates educational and English language communication.

Subject-subjectivity and partnership represent an innovative trend in the methodology of teaching English at the university level. This approach establishes a close relationship between the teacher and students, granting students influence over their occupation or even the educational process as a whole.

Initiative, proactivity, and partnership, in addition to English language proficiency, foster important communicative competencies such as initiative, creativity, responsibility, and autonomy. The pedagogy of partnership, characterized by democratic cooperation between teachers and students, creates a favorable psychological climate in the classroom. It promotes the optimal organization of educational activities, ensures educational autonomy for everyone, enhances students' responsibility for their learning outcomes, motivates comprehensive personal development, and allows students to fully realize their potential.

The role of the teacher is not diminished but transformed, taking on the roles of an interlocutor, moderator, and consultant.

The innovative approach of continuous English language use both inside and outside the classroom involves a departure from traditional Soviet language learning methods. The focus is placed on minimizing the use of the native language during class and ideally eliminating it altogether. English should be maximally utilized outside of class, during breaks, and when addressing everyday and current life tasks.

Discursivity and online communication are crucial elements that involve the incorporation of spontaneous needs and turns in communication. Discourse, unlike text, is deeply rooted in current reality and immersed in real-life situations. Continuous English language use emphasizes cultural and personal aspects, emphasizing the practice of language use rather than the ability to translate or retell unrelated texts.

Interactivity, previously a prominent principle in humanities education, has regained relevance with the advent of multimedia and the widespread availability of the internet. Interactive technologies, facilitated by devices such as touch panels, electronic whiteboards, and projectors, offer limitless possibilities and require a creative approach in each educational situation, rather than the development of new techniques. The combination of interactivity and multimedia enables students to learn foreign languages through multiple channels, engaging visual and auditory senses and promoting cognitive processes through constant interaction.

Maximum interactivity in foreign language classes involves the communicative chain components of student-classmate (mini-group)-teacher-text-multimedia source. Interactive methods have been found to positively impact student and teacher motivation, particularly in addressing the low motivation often associated with foreign language learning.

The competence-based approach, the leading paradigm in pedagogy, aligns effectively with the current educational, professional, and communicative practices in foreign languages. This is particularly relevant to English, which has become a universal international language and an instrument of cultural exchange. Essential competencies to be developed in students include practical speaking, reading, and translation skills; the ability to address practical communicative tasks in English; the application of English at personal and professional levels; and a continuous drive for self-improvement in English language knowledge.

To align with the latest trends, it is recommended to abandon outdated approaches in English language teaching at the university level and implement new approaches that incorporate European standards, content transformation, universal levels of English language competencies, and the recommendations of reputable organizations. Methodologically, this entails the integration of multimedia, discursivity, online communication, subject-subjectivity, interactivity, deductive reasoning, interactive approaches, and the competence-based approach. It is crucial to stimulate the continuous use of English language skills.

The theoretical observations presented in this publication serve as a starting point for the practical implementation of these trends in educational institutions. However, they need to be tested through practical experiments in order to introduce European standards for English language learning. The ideas discussed in this article should encourage experienced university teachers to adjust the content and methods of English language educational programs, translating educational discourse into practical communicative foundations. At the core of this approach is an active and proactive student who strives to interact

professionally with the modern world at everyday, business, and professional levels.

In conclusion, the implementation of innovative approaches in English language teaching, utilizing multimedia tools, offers numerous benefits for students. It enhances their motivation to learn foreign languages, provides access to diverse and alternative sources of information, fosters independent thinking, promotes creative self-expression, and cultivates effective communication skills, as well as cultural and professional competence.

By incorporating these technologies, language classes become more diverse, informative, and pedagogically rich, resulting in increased effectiveness. However, it is essential that the content of English language courses in technical universities align with professional orientations to maximize the impact of these approaches.

As teaching methods for foreign languages continuously evolve, there is a growing demand for their exploration and research. Among these methods, the communicative approach stands out as one of the most effective. Thus, there are promising prospects for further investigation and development in the field of communicative language teaching.

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