

## **INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY INTO EDUCATION: METHODS, TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES**

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Globalization processes together with technological innovations have caused significant changes in higher education landscape and the transformation in role and operation of higher education institutions that now evolve from being the center of knowledge dissemination to mediums for a wide range of cross-border relationships. In order to cope with the changing circumstances and meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, students need to know how to use their knowledge and skills by thinking critically, adapting to new situations, analyzing information, comprehending new ideas, communicating, collaborating, solving problems and making decisions. That has inspired educationalists to look for new, innovative, more effective techniques and methods of classroom teaching. Predictably, the use of multimedia in the learning process has become a must: compared to the traditional teaching methods in which students are usually passively spoon fed with large amount of grammatical rules and vocabulary, multimedia has shown its superiority. Students can be easily exposed to sound, video, and animation of the authentic target language, which can give the students the strong visual impact and make them get involved in the authentic language environment more completely. Learners' language acquisition can be improved by means of using the computer's integration of text, sound, graphics and image to present the learning content. The Internet offers a lot of opportunities for students to interact with native speakers in a convenient way and provides access to the most updated information throughout the world. Also, teachers can present video and audio materials separately or simultaneously to the students according to the teacher's objectives. In this case, not only could the multimedia make the students get more interested in English learning, but also more progress could be made compared with that one in the traditional classroom.

Computers are the main tool used to present multimedia items such as video, Powerpoint presentations, animation and sound. In the classroom, computers have

made a huge impact on the way teachers provide information to their students. Using computers, teachers have evolved their teaching methods; instead of lecturing and writing notes on a blackboard, teachers can now show their students visual and audio material to enhance their learning. These methods are much more productive for students who process information visually.

Computer technology has given us the Internet, which is an electronic medium in which both print and visual resources are invariably bound. At the click of a mouse, text resources present students with a diverse collection of authentic English language texts dealing with a wide variety of interdisciplinary topics, and at each web page link, students have the advantage of reading print texts with the benefit of immediate visual reinforcement provided by pictures and slide shows, facilitating the collaborative effects of print and visual information processing. Integrating the Internet yields the additional benefit of increased student motivation. Besides, students develop greater confidence in their ability to use English because they need to interact with the Internet entirely through reading and writing. Using the Internet for focus discipline research facilitates development higher order thinking skills and also promotes critical and social literacy as students encounter a variety of information, synthesizing that information through cooperation and collaboration with their peers.

Projectors have become a popular teaching tool adding interest and interactivity to lessons and are used to project images from a computer onto a larger screen so that students can easily see what is being shown. Projectors make it possible for teachers to show a large classroom or auditorium multimedia content such as videos, or Powerpoint presentations.

Regardless all the advantages, the application of multimedia in teaching is not as widely used as it could be expected. A reason for this could be the underdevelopment of technology and immature pedagogy about using multimedia in teaching foreign languages. For example, multimedia cost is high and not all educational institutions can make use of this tool. In addition, many teachers are not trained in using multimedia to teach English.

In general, those who use multimedia as a teaching tool find that it adds more interest to the class, and because students become interested in multimedia and computers, they learn more language skills. Multimedia effectiveness lies in the ability to expose students to real situations, language use and pronunciation through video, sound, graphics and computer interaction.

Incorporating technology into education caused the introduction of innovative methods of teaching that have become a breakthrough in the education industry. M-learning or mobile learning that is usually defined as "learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices" [2] has become a new trend in EFL teaching practice.

Mobile devices hold great potential for language learning such as anytime access to an ever increasing amount of information and resources; sharing learning materials and information through apps and/or social networking sites; the possibility to ask questions via the internet; the ability to study through games; to keep study records; to create one's own vocabulary lists; using photos on students' phones for introductions, descriptions, telling stories etc. M-learning method contributes to creation of authentic learning environment in which learners can work with their mobile devices for audio messaging, voice recording, pronunciation comparison, and audio or video conferencing.

These reasons support the use of smartphones and tablet PCs for foreign language learning and make communication between a teacher and students more efficient and productive.

However, introducing mobile technology into higher education is more than applying technical innovations. It also means providing technical support and learning strategies for students and instructors who wish to implement mobile learning in their particular academic setting as well as developing new apps for educational purposes.

One of the newest instruction approaches that caters to the needs of modern-day learners is E-Learning. This teaching strategy refers to "the delivery of a learning, training or education program by electronic means" and involves "the use

of a computer or electronic device (e.g. a mobile phone) in some way to provide training, educational or learning material" [3]. In general, e-learning environment includes a virtual classroom with an instructor (tutor) who plans group activity in the virtual class, and students that choose an e-platform to learn, go to a specialized website, register with the personal data and become users.

E-learning education can be delivered in three different ways:

- 1) **synchronously**, providing the interaction of an instructor and a student at the same time over the internet;
- 2) **asynchronously**, giving students the opportunity of the Web based training on his own time and schedule, without live interaction with the instructor;
- 3) **independently**, allowing an individual user to download course material from the Internet or use it directly from the CD, going through it alone.

In fact, learning process individualization is mentioned as one of the key advantages of e-learning. As for the other benefits, they are as follows: easy accessibility any where any time, reduced cost, mobility, improve performance, higher motivation, attractive content package, efficiency of conveyed message etc.

However, scholars also point to some drawbacks of e-learning approach among which there is high cost of technical equipment and software, dependence on the quality of Internet connection, time-consuming for teachers; reducing the ability of verbal expression, lack of familiar educational patterns and learning routines. Thus, even despite its benefits and attractiveness as well as effectiveness in particular educational environments, e-learning can't totally substitute traditional face-to-face teaching model.

The solution to this problem that allows to combine traditional classroom methods with technology-mediated instructional forms and practices is so called "blended learning". This teaching technique means a much greater change in basic instruction rather than simply adding computers to classrooms; it represents, in many cases, a fundamental change in the way teachers and students approach the learning. The efficiency and main benefit of this method is that the online and in-person learning experiences would go side by side and complement one another:

students might attend a class taught by a teacher in a traditional classroom setting and later on, independently, complete online components of the course outside the classroom. Thus, this "hybrid" system enables to incorporate new forms of collaborative and independent learning activities, personalized training experiences and teacher's feedback as well as freedom, convenience and flexibility that are not possible in traditional courses. Besides implementing blended learning into ESL classroom helps to create an authentic environment that most closely resembles actual use of the target language in that way significantly improving the learning experience.

Blended learning is a mix of three different components:

- traditional classroom instructor-led foreign language teaching;
- synchronous online formats such as eMeetings, instant messaging and e-mailing, webinars, online conferences etc;
- asynchronous self-paced study that can include web/computer-based training modules, taking online tests or quizzes, gaining access to the variety of reference materials (documents, presentations, web pages, video and audio files, discussion forums etc).

Compared to traditional education, blended instruction offers teachers the possibility to spend more time with learners in both small groups and individually, create a flexible and active learning environment that has the potential to change students' experiences and outcomes and can allow teachers to monitor their students' progress more closely than traditional methods. Reasons for using blended instruction include "improved pedagogy, easy access to knowledge, more interaction among learners, personal presence, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision of learning content" [1, 28]. Additionally, blended learning puts forward new demands for teachers and students: students have to be responsible for their own learning process, and teachers need to take on roles as material designers, producers of media resources, managers of the learning environment, and online tutors [6].

As a result when implemented effectively, a blended learning program can make better use of English language instruction as it allows students to explore and

practice new language not only in the classroom, but also in their own time and at their own pace according to their own personal learning needs thus resulting in student success, satisfaction, and retention.

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