ICT as a motivational tool in the learning of foreign languages

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Abstract—Motivation undoubtedly is the key in any learning. This article particularly focuses on the learning of foreign languages and the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the learning process with respect to learner’s motivation. Firstly, the issue of motivation and the role of ICT in the foreign language learning are outlined. Secondly, the author describes specific examples of the ICT implementation in foreign language classes in order to raise student’s motivation to learn a foreign language, in this case English.

Keywords—english, foreign language, learning, ICT, motivation, multimedia, students. university education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is an important factor in the learning of foreign languages. And every teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) looks all the time for different ways how to raise student’s motivation. [1] sets several conditions for teachers so that they might make motivation in classes possible:

- Create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere.
- Promote the development of group cohesiveness.
- Increase the students’ expectation of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.
- Make learning stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of classroom events.
- Make learning stimulating and enjoyable by increasing the attractiveness of tasks.
- Make learning stimulating and enjoyable for learners by enlisting them as active task participants.
- Present and administer tasks in a motivating way.
- Provide students with regular experiences of success.
- Build your learners’ confidence by providing regular encouragement.
- Increase student motivation by promoting cooperation among the learners.
- Increase student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy.
- Increase learner satisfaction.
- Offer rewards in a motivational manner.

And some of the conditions mentioned above can be fulfilled by using ICT since ICT have a positive impact on learning [2]:

- learning concentrates rather on the learner than a teacher;
- learning becomes more personalized;
- learning becomes on the one hand more independent, on the other more collaborative and interactive;
- learning can happen at any place and any time;
- learning is enriched with more up-to-date materials, which can be tailored according to students’ immediate needs;
- thanks to multimedia activities, learning becomes more varied and dynamic;
- learning requires critical thinking;
- learning becomes more culture conscious.

ICT are nowadays part and parcel of everyday life. Especially young people cannot imagine being deprived of them. For them ICT are as natural as breathing. Therefore they are also widely exploited in education, including second language learning and teaching [3]. Moreover, the English language teachers attempt to involve ICT in their teaching in order to make students’ learning more effective and motivating [4], [5] or [6]. In the learning and teaching of English ICT can be used in the following ways:

- using various websites sites for developing language skills (see Appendix 1 for examples);
- communicating with native and non-native speakers via e-mail, Skype, chat, twitter, blog and other Web 2.0 applications;
- using online courses;
- using online reference tools, e.g. online dictionaries; and
- creating and publishing one’s work, for instance, wikis [7].

II. SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT IN RAISING LEARNERS’ MOTIVATION IN EFL CLASSES

This section depicts two specific examples of the exploitation of ICT in EFL classes, both at elementary and secondary schools in order to raise students’ motivation for learning English. The first example is an illustration of the project On-line teaching of English language at elementary schools in the Czech Republic, which ran from November 2011 till December 2012. At six elementary schools located in the city of Hradec Kralove and in Hradec Kralove region of the Czech Republic, teachers of English introduced in their conversation classes videoconferences with teachers from
abroad, in this case from the Philippines. The age of pupils spanned from the year of 9 to 15, from the fourth up to ninth grades. These videoconferences were run via Skype. The provider and creator of the web application was company OPEN-IT. The whole project was financed by the European Social Fund and from the budget of the Czech Republic. Also four teachers of English from the Department of Applied Linguistics of the Faculty of Informatics and Management in Hradec Kralove participated in the project as professional advisors, coaches and creators of methodological worksheets that were used during the English conversation classes by the Philippine teachers (see Appendix 2 for an example of a lesson plan).

The English conversation classes were held once in two weeks for 45 minutes (regular duration of English classes in that were used during the English conversation classes by the advisors, coaches and creators of methodological worksheets Hradec Kralove participated in the project as professional

Linguistics of the Faculty of Informatics and Management in four teachers of English from the Department of Applied Social Fund and from the budget of the Czech Republic. Also were varied, for example:

- Introducing oneself,
- Things around us,
- Family,
- Seasons of the year,
- Christmas,
- Culture,
- Environment ….

During the English conversation classes pupils were sitting in different classes, computer laboratories or in school corridors and working in groups of 3-4 at one laptop. All the technical equipment for learning English via Skype, including the portable computers, was financed from the project. Students were communicating with the Philippine teachers or were doing different interactive activities with one another. Most often four Philippine teachers entered the conversation classes in order to work with individual team of pupils (see Fig. 1 below). Their Czech counterparts acted as facilitators or advisors to their pupils during these lessons.

Responses after the completion of the project were completely positive. Children thoroughly enjoyed these conversation classes. In addition, most of them had not had any chances to speak with a foreigner in English before the project started. Therefore, they felt quite enthusiastic about being understood by a foreign speaker and being able to understand him/her. As one parent said, it is very motivating for kids because they can apply the language they learn during the lesson with their Czech teacher in talking with a foreign person who speaks that language, too. Moreover, they are happy when the foreign teacher understands them and they understand her/him. They can see that without knowing a foreign language, particularly English, they would not be able to make themselves understood in the present world. It is a big asset to know and speak English nowadays.

Obviously the project generated more benefits for students such as a co-operation among the pupils themselves. They learned how to work in a team, how to delegate tasks, how to make a compromise and concessions or how to take on a responsibility for their tasks. They became more autonomous in their learning. Furthermore, besides enhancing and practicing the language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) they acquired during the lessons with their Czech teacher, they learned the skills of rhetoric since they had to speak clearly and loudly. They practiced pronunciation and intonation of individual words or phrases, too. When they worked on a computer, they also expanded their computer skills. In addition, they discovered different culture and perhaps they started to realize what their own culture is like and what they value in their own culture and in their life. In addition, their Czech teachers of English said that the idea of the project was great, most of my pupils improved their communication in English: for some of them it was the first opportunity to use spoken English with a foreigner. Moreover, they stopped being afraid of speaking with someone else in English (www.netlektor.cz/elektor/c2p/cont/o_projektu/zkusenosti)

The second example is based on Slovak EFL teachers’ experience with using multimedia in their classes at elementary and secondary schools in Slovakia. Multimedia as one of the areas of ICT have an enormous impact on the learning of any language since they affect more senses at a time. In the winter semester of 2013 17 Slovak teachers were given questionnaires in order to express their opinions on using multimedia in their English classes. These teachers study English part-time at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra to extend their teaching qualification.

All teachers but one claimed that they implemented multimedia at least once a week since they can see that their pupils really like working with them. Moreover, they emphasized the following benefits of multimedia for their teaching:

- lessons are more interesting for students;
- students get more involved into learning; they are more motivated and active;
- lessons offer a bigger variety of teaching;
- students develop real-life communication;

Figure1. An example of a conversation lesson
• students can develop four basic language skills, grammar, realia and intercultural communication;
• students develop their remembering and thinking skills;
• students are exposed to real English;
• multimedia affect more students’ senses;
• both students and teachers have an easier access to authentic materials; and
• multimedia can support different learning styles.

Most of the teachers (67%) wrote that they used web pages in their teaching. Six respondents (55%) stated using CD ROMs; three people (27%) an interactive board; two respondents (18%) video and the same number (18%) DVDs. See Fig. 2 below.

![Figure 2. Types of multimedia used in English classes in Slovakia](image)

In addition, most of the respondents also stated that they particularly used multimedia aimed at the development of listening (nine teachers/ 82%) and speaking skills (eight people/ 73%) in order to have up-to-date authentic material for their English lessons. In this way they use, for example, podcasts to develop pupils’ listening skills. These skills were then followed by the multimedia focused on the development of vocabulary (six teachers/ 55%) and the same number of teachers (55%) used multimedia for teaching realia. The last group of multimedia was then evenly concentrated on the development of writing skills (three teachers/ 27%) and grammar (three teachers/ 27%). See Fig. 3 below.

![Figure 3. Exploitation of multimedia in the development of language skills and structures](image)

Furthermore, in the subject Multimedia in the teaching of English the Slovak teachers of English presented different ways of using multimedia in their classes. One teacher came up with a brilliant idea. If the school does have enough computers, he suggests using a wireless mouse which is then passed from one student to another when they are, for example, involved in playing an interactive game for developing grammar structures on a computer.

III. CONCLUSION

Thus, one can see that ICT really have a very positive and motivating effect on students’ learning. Teachers should take advantage of this fact and implement ICT into their teaching of English because ICT are stimulating and appealing for students. Moreover, they affect more senses at a time and thus, they could expand students’ memory to remember things in an easier way. ICT can also develop more language skills and raise intercultural awareness in students. Although ICT have a positive effect on the development of L2 language acquisition, they must be carefully chosen to suit a particular teaching situation and to meet specific needs of students because not all kinds of multimedia are relevant for teaching or learning situations [8]. In addition, if teachers want to use some specific websites, they should evaluate them thoroughly in advance.

Finally, potential research in this area should further continue in the exploitation of ICT in education with respect to learners’ motivation.

APPENDIX I

A list of tested and evaluated websites with a short description for the learning of English:

Youtube.com (http://www.youtube.com) is a website which is widely used by English teachers because it affects most of student’s senses and develops all four language skills at a time: listening, reading, writing and speaking.

TeachingEnglish.org.uk (http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk) is a website which was developed by the British Council and BBC. Besides teacher training, teacher development, exams in English, and various events, this site also serves as a valuable resource for L2 English teachers. It offers plans and activities, completed with worksheets to download, for primary, secondary and adult teachers.

HelpForEnglish.cz (http://www.helpforenglish.cz) is a website developed by a Czech teacher of English. It again focuses on all age levels and offers a great number of teaching resources, such as tests, grammar and vocabulary exercises, pronunciation, reading and listening activities, quizzes, and many more tips.

BusyTeacher.org (http://www.busyteacher.org) is another website which supplies ready-made worksheets on different every day and seasonal topics for English teachers. In addition, it provides ESL (English as a second language) articles, classroom management worksheets, flashcards, classroom posters and other materials. Once again this website covers all
ListentoEnglish.com (http://www.listentoenglish.com) is a podcast website for the intermediate and advanced learners of English, mostly aimed at adult learners. The podcasts on this site help to improve English vocabulary, pronunciation and listening skills. They are quite short (5 or 6 minutes) and delivered in clearly spoken English. Many are linked to grammar and vocabulary notes, exercises or quizzes.

APPENDIX 2

An example of a lesson plan for a conversation class

CHRISTMAS (4 and 5 grades)

Activity 1
Materials: lyrics of Jingle bells song
Procedure:
You can start your lesson with singing Jingle bells or playing the song on the CD recorder in order to introduce the topic of Christmas. At the same time you can show your pupils the lyrics or a picture to demonstrate the song. Please see the attached File 1. Ask your students to try to sing it with you.
Timing: 5 – 10 min

Activity 2
Materials: a picture/ flashcard, a pen
Procedure:
Show your pupils a flashcard of a Christmas tree, typical of the Czech Republic (see File 2) and prepare in advance a picture of the Christmas tree used in your country. Practise saying with your pupils: Christmas tree, Christmas decorations, Christmas presents by pointing at individual items. Finally, draw a picture of the present you wish to get for Christmas. And ask the students to do the same. Name each present and practise saying:
I wish…… a car, a book…..
Timing: 10 – 15 min

Activity 3
Materials: a picture, a piece of paper, a pen, crayons
Procedure:
Prepare in advance on a piece of paper a very simple picture of what you eat and drink at Christmas. Then, during the lesson tell pupils about it. Afterwards, ask them to tell you what they have for their Christmas dinner. (Note: in the Czech Republic the traditional Christmas dinner consists of fish soup, fried carp and potato salad).
Timing: 10 - 15min

REFERENCES