ADVANTAGE OF EMPLOYING CUTTING – EDGE TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract: The pace with which the leading and state-of-the-art computer technologies made us to live our lives may also be applied to the process of teaching and learning foreign languages. Familiarizing the new generation with everything that TICE implies (information and communication technologies in education) may be regarded as a great asset for both the teacher and the learner. Through cheerful and energetic learning, the student takes a break from the regular and ordinary routine and the learning process itself becomes much more attractive and interactive, focusing significantly more on the content. Social networks - so much populated by our young generation - connect interlocutors across the globe, making them use a common language. As for the various language registers, the advantage is again pretty obvious, as we take into account the use of a current, natural language, which sometimes becomes slightly colloquial or libertine but so alive.
Keywords: extrinsic / intrinsic motivation, TICE, interculturality, social networks, multi-media materials.

Starting from the premises that human ambition is boundless and knows no limits whatsoever, we may assume that the current lifestyle that suits the modern-day demands requires a permanent calibration of human abilities and skills, including those related to actually knowing and fluently speaking foreign languages. Facing globalization process (at all levels) in a pretty aggressive manner, we really need to align ourselves to the new technological requirements. Therefore, as teachers, it is of paramount importance to discover and put into practice exactly the aspects and elements that motivate our students as well as to identify the available technological variants which are the most appropriate for every group of students. Fortunately, the new generation has an immense opening to information technology, virtual communication, and frequent use of social networks, which makes it easier to approach and implement this teaching method.

Considering that we address an adult age group (students), the use of these technological tools is highly appropriate, as our students are fully able to use them at their true valences. A significant plus is that the vast majority of our students own or at least has full access to the necessary equipment, tools and devices, such as: personal computers, tablets, smart phones, Internet connection, etc.. One of the chief advantages deriving from this methodological approach is individualized learning, which fully observes the cognitive profile of every student. By actively using the cheerful learning, the student is given a break from the ordinary routine and, at the same time, the learning process itself becomes more attractive and interactive, the student's focus being concentrated pretty much on the content. Among the multimedia tools, the Internet is the most valuable tool, because via Internet we are now able to access websites, blogs, forums that mediate the exchange of information between students and teachers or between native learners and the speakers of a target language.

A priceless tool also facilitated by the existence of Internet is the Facebook (the world's most visited site after Google), which is a true virtual universe where people of different nationalities and cultures gather up virtually and permanently exchange information. The main goals of using this platform are somehow related to the cognitive and communication aspects. Advantages are obviously implicit: reading comments and writing messages with automated proof-reader support, which once it detected a spelling error highlights it in red and corrects it so that the student can quickly learn the correct version of that word. As for the language registers, the advantage is again obvious, taking into account the use of a current, natural language, sometimes slightly colloquial or libertine but so alive.

The state-of-the-art mobiles and tablets are also valuable tools as they allow the easy installation and use of multilingual dictionaries, translation applications or even encyclopedias.

We need to emphasize, however, that this does not substitute for the role of a teacher; all these are simply meant to facilitate the teacher's work and to enhance the teaching and learning process of any foreign language, whatsoever.

A brief history of employing the TICE1 in teaching foreign languages

Didactics of foreign languages, more than any other subject, has been focused, even from its very beginnings, on the use of technology due to a number of various perspectives: firstly because it allowed the outside

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1 TICE - information and communication technologies in education (*tehnologie de informare și comunicare pentru educație)*

world to enter the classroom, then, from the communication perspective (the advantages being pretty obvious) and, finally, due to the fact that by using the existing applications, the student is now able to benefit from computer-assisted learning. This was introduced as a first learning step in the '60s and is was based on the use of structural exercises (in writing form). In the early '90s, the first multimedia teaching programs have already been published, first on diskettes, and then on CDROM supports. Towards the end of the '90s, the widespread use of the Internet has led to a radical shift in the perception of the process of language learning. Moreover, by implementing the e-learning concept, even distance learning programs have been reached and successfully attended.

The contribution of the new learning technologies should be regarded qualitatively rather than quantitatively. The major role of a teacher is to select the most appropriate option for the goal he/she pursues. The effect that is obtained is strictly depending on choosing both the objective and the appropriate tools.

Over the time, as a result of various studies conducted on this subject, it has been concluded that there are no multimedia resources that may be used for each and every objective we pursue. Gerlach and Ely have developed a matrix of variables that help teachers make a rational selection of the appropriate teaching tool[2]. It relates to:

- adequacy: choosing the right means to fulfil the task / objective we pursue;
- degree of difficulty: the teacher needs to make sure that the level of his/her students is consistent with the use of the means concerned;
- price: the cost of the tools that are employed;
- availability: it is highly important that the teaching material is available any time and particularly at the intended moment;
- technological quality: it is essential that the material to be used be of an acoustically, visually, legibly, acceptable quality.

The "miracle" of the Internet lies not only in the availability of information at any moment at an incredible speed, but also in the ability to communicate with individuals of different cultures and civilizations, which cultivates the phenomenon of interculturality, so valuable in and for the language learning process. A brief review of the communication sites that meet all the above matrix criteria would be the following: Facebook; duolingo.com; polyspeaks.com; 12speak.com; lexxing.com; lingomatch.com; babbel.com; livemocha.com; mylanguageexchange.com; polyglot.com; wolty.com.

2 Kurt, S. "The Gerlach and Ely Design Model," in *Educational Technology*, November 25, 2016. https:// educationaltechnology.net/gerlach-ely-design-model/

Moreover, all these platforms provide their resources free of charge, allowing thus the users to improve their linguistic levels and skills at the desired pace.

For example, the Facebook platform has been made available for the first time at Harvard University, being initially thought as a social network designed to connect the students attending that university. Subsequently (as of September 2006), the website was then opened to all the people concerned, gradually reaching an unimaginable scale. In July 2010, Mark Zuckerberg - his founder - announced on his blog that Facebook regroups over 500 million active members. The evolution of this platform is fulminating, so by the end of January 2019, the Facebook community had already reached 2.32 billion[3]. Beyond its major and initial objective (socialization), this website facilitates language learning, making it much easier to communicate under the protection of anonymity. Also, to support communication, there has been introduced the option to translate texts (into 78 languages) as of July 31, 2011, helping thus the users to understand as much as possible the message sent by his/her interlocutor and ultimately to facilitate cultural exchanges.

Forums - the IT phrase "forum" refers to the space where public discussions are held and are archived, allowing thus an asynchronous communication. In language teaching, the forum may be a valuable tool because the participants publish and edit their messages, respond to those written by others creating thus a sequence that shapes a chain of conversations. Due to the fact that the contents of conversations are kept for a longer period of time, participants may always come back and make various comments on them. Basically, within the forums, the messages are usually presented in chronological or hierarchical order, each message being considered as a response to the previous message. Often the administrators create different sections which are reserved to discussion on various topics, themes, questions or tasks to be accomplished / completed.

Blog - This abbreviation comes from weblog (Internet newspaper). Often defined as a personal site, the blog is rather an individual space created to allow all Internet users to express themselves. Various multimodal functions (text, image, sound, video) are available here. Used in the pedagogical spectrum, the blog develops the teamwork spirit and builds the so-called educational spaces where both the work of teachers and students is present in a certain logic, and which outline the development of

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3 https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/

the skills and collective work in and out of the class. In such cases, the information needs to be well organized internally and externally. Internal organization is done through hypertextual animation (links, keywords), while external organization is provided by administering the blog. Nowadays, the use of blogs has become a necessity, even for teachers, who through them have the ability to communicate effectively with their students.

Mobile Phone - We all know that the main purpose of creating a mobile phone was to allow people to communicate; however, the development of technology has quickly added other features such as mp3, tape recorder, radio, etc. Starting from the third and fourth generations of mobile phones, it is possible to install applications that facilitate language learning. We are talking particularly about dictionaries, encyclopaedias and translation programs which support a faster and simpler learning of a foreign language. Once the phone has been provided with such an application and an Internet connection, the student may even look for a word that he/she does not understand while attending the course, gaining thus time and implicitly enriching his/her linguistic luggage. Otherwise, in a traditional manner, he/she would probably have written this word down, and, once at home, he/she would have probably consulted a dictionary (or would have forgotten to do it completely), the complete assimilation of information being impossible during the course. Use of all these new technologies trains the learners' intellectual skills, preparing him/her to quickly find solutions, to analyze the problems and to choose the most convenient option. The idea of learning something new goes onto the second place because most of the time the learner focuses on the content of the information, so, as this process is no longer been perceived as an effort, the learning process is far from being demanding, but rather pleasant and stimulating.

A second advantage would be that of time-saving, if considering that most of the language learning platforms provide the facility of almost instantaneous correction of tests / answers to questions, so that the student / learner is no longer forced to wait for the teacher's correction to validate his/her knowledge.

However, the shortcoming in this case would be related to the lack of a "reward", or we all know that sometimes, beyond the internal motivation, any student needs an external reward as well. It would be beneficial in this case that a teacher monitors the learning process by following-up and regularly assessing the student's progress.

According to modern theories of motivation, So Ryan[4] highlighted three primary needs related to intrinsic motivation: *curiosity, self-determination and sense of competence*.

As far as extrinsic motivation is concerned, the student's commitment is not free; the student is waiting for a positive feedback from an external factor as a means of getting something/somewhere. The factors that influence the external motivation are: rewards, social approval, social comparison, positive sanction, computer tool. With regard to this last factor, we could mention some of the advantages that it offers: the positive curiosity of the student towards what he / she is about to discover, sensory and emotional stimulation, an agreeable presentation method, speed, the feeling that this tool is able to facilitate the understanding and the completion of the tasks.

Using and applying all these tools in French and German language courses for at least 12 years now, we have concluded that the use of these teaching technologies triggers motivational dynamics and facilitates the learner to acquire a significant amount of new knowledge. In addition, the way the students perceive their teacher changes significantly, seeing him/her from this new perspective as a coach, as a motivational factor and not as a constraining and possibly punitive entity. Of course, dosing of these techniques during the course / seminar classes is the strategy of every teacher involved, but if we take into account the great advantage of even partial autonomy of the learner as well as the self-training at the desired pace and the voluntary fulfilment of some tasks outside the classroom / seminar (replacing the classic "homework" which is so hated by all students), we must admit that the benefits are definitely substantial.

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http://www.pedagopsy.eu/regles_motivation.htm
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