TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS WITH TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

L. ȘCHIOPU, A. BÎRZOI

"Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Abstract
The use of modern technologies in teaching English to young learners, including innovative strategies, methods, techniques and educational digital online resources, is fully expressed in the didactic process. These technologies create a favourable platform for reforms and research on the preschool curriculum of teaching English in the new era. In the process of preschool instruction of the English language, modern technologies facilitate the implementation of a person-centred approach to teaching, ensure the differentiation and individualization of learning, taking into account the abilities, level of knowledge, children's preferences and needs. The use of the educational digital online resources is aligned with student interest in learning the English language through the accumulation and expansion of knowledge and experience.

Keywords: technology, pedagogical technology, educational digital online resources, and communication competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of foreign languages opens a way into a captivating global world with its great flow of information and innovations. The society of the information age is interested in its citizens being able to make decisions, act independently and actively, flexibly adapt to changing living conditions and, which is essential, master at least one foreign language. It has become a communicative need and a constructive element of educational policies favourable to our European integration at the political, economic, socio-cultural and human level. The benefit of studying foreign languages is related to access to other languages, cultures, civilizations and ensures European citizens a more secure future in terms of knowledge, development, communication, research and employment" [1]. Nowadays, the link between technology and linguistic education is becoming more dynamic and complex. On the one hand, we are seeing an unprecedented evolution in technology that requires new skills, behaviours and attitudes. On the other hand, technology adoption is growing rapidly. Modern information and communication technologies are shaping a new way of learning, which is transmitted or created by the virtual world.

In pedagogical literature *technology* is:

- The branch of knowledge that deals with the creation of digital products and use of instruments, tools and other technical means, and their interrelation with life, society, and the environment [2].
- The practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area [3].
- The body of knowledge used to create tools and develop skills; the coinage of scientific method and resources to solve a problem [4].
- A part of the curriculum as an instructional delivery system as a tool to enhance the entire learning process [5].
-

In the '60s the term pedagogical technology was coined as a process of a qualitative change in the student's behaviour [6]. Pedagogical technology is the organization of the educational process on the basis of design that leads to more effective learning by increasing the interest and motivation of students. The leading link in any technology is teaching. A good deal of attention is drawn to pedagogical competences, pedagogical tact, pedagogical style, pedagogical accuracy and innovative features of pedagogical practice such as creativity, high professionalism, analytical and critical approach to reflection [7].

According to Vologushkina N.V. the most important characteristics of pedagogical technologies are the following:
a) efficiency - the high level of achievement of the educational goal by each student;
b) efficacy – the ability to produce a desired or intended result when a large amount of educational material is absorbed with the least expenditure of effort on mastering the content;
c) ergonomics - learning takes place in a cooperative environment, a positive emotional microclimate, without overloading and overworking;
d) high motivation in the field, which contributes to an increase of interest in class and allows the student to improve the best personal qualities to explore his potential [8].

The main feature of pedagogical technology is that it determines and implements the preschool educational process that ensures the accomplishment of learning objectives. Multimedia technology allows preschool teachers to deliver more colourful and stimulating lessons, opening up new horizons. A variety of modern methods can be applied in accordance with the specific didactic framework of the English language learning in the preschool setting: for assessing and evaluation, learning, teaching, storytelling, listening or interpretation. But it is crucial not to allow the technology to take on the role of teachers. Dudeney and Hocky relate the importance and actuality of integration of educational digital online resources in language teaching, and mention that:

- Young learners are growing up with technology. For these learners, the use of technology is a way to bring the outside world into the classroom. Educational digital online resources offer new opportunities for authentic tasks and materials, as well as access to a wealth of ready-made English language teaching materials.
- Technology offers new ways of practicing language and textbooks.
- Technology is becoming increasingly mobile.

- Technology tools can give young learners exposure to outside world and practice all four main language skills – speaking, listening, drawing and reading [4].

Appropriate use of technology in preschool education can complement or enhance learning in a variety of ways:
- To increase the amount of background information available on a given topic.
- To introduce children to cultures, attractions, features and places outside of their community.
- To communicate with preschool educators worldwide to exchange the best practices via video conferences.
- To be culturally responsive.

Culturally responsive materials aim to create a preschool learning environment that is conducive to learning for all students, regardless of their ethnic, cultural or linguistic background. Children themselves can be actively involved in the educational process and participate in the creation of this content. The correct use of technology has tremendous potential to help infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities integrate and participate in daily routines; have increased access to the general educational curriculum; improve their functional outcomes and educational results; and meet primary school, secondary school, high school curriculum standards [8].

2. METHODOLOGY

The experimental research project was conducted at a Private Preschool Educational Center in Chisinau, Moldova and involved two groups of 6–7-year-old students, 10 students each respectively. The student population from the experimental and control groups had been exposed to the preschool English language curriculum with technology integration for one year.

The main goal of teaching the English language to young learners was the formation and development of communicative competence with an emphasis on listening, comprehension, pronunciation and speaking. In the process of English language teaching and learning the following competencies were conducted in the following stages:

1 – identifying the teaching method that would allow each student to show his/her activity and creativity;
2 - creating the conditions for the practical mastery of the English language;
3 - activating the student's cognitive activity in the process of the didactic task;
4 - fostering comprehension that would allow the students to receive new information, decode it, correlate with existing knowledge, and analyse it;
5 – practicing through holistic comprehension, generalization of the information received, the formation of each of the students' own attitude on the content being studied [9].

The following types of activities were conducted during the English lessons with children of preschool age:
1. Pronunciation drills: tongue twisters, rhymes, fairy tales, exercises, gestures.

2. Observing objects: descriptions, dialogues with toys, games and fairy tales.
3. Analysing pictures: descriptions, detailing, dialogues, games, comparison.
4. Learning and recitation of poems, nursery rhymes, counting rhymes, tongue twisters, rhymes recitations, recitation of different genres (optimistic, sad, angry), competitions in teams and pairs.
5. Learning songs, listening to fairy tales and stories.
6. Outdoor games: ball games, "chain" with a toy, physical exercises, dances, team games.
7. Quiet games: board games, bingo, riddles, crosswords.
8. Creative and situational games: role-playing games, interviews, everyday stories.
9. Picture-based storytelling: juxtaposition, description, comparison, imagination with prediction.
10. Study of letters and sounds: writing in a notebook, drawing words for given letters or sounds, shading letters, a video course on working out the alphabet.
11. Working with video material: watching and discussing cartoons and short stories in English.

In this study with young learners the following modern pedagogical technologies were used:
- Technology of communicative teaching
- The technology of multilevel (differentiated) learning
- Information and communication technologies
- Technology of individualization of learning
- The technology of the language portfolio
- Testing technology
- Project technology
- Technology of learning in cooperation
- Game technology
- Technology for the development of critical thinking.

During the period of teaching the English language to pre-schoolers, it was necessary to lay the foundations for the comprehensive development of communicative competence, which is formed in all types of creative activities - listening, speaking, storytelling, dancing and drawing.

The research was aligned with English language curriculum- Optional English Language Curriculum for Early Education Institutions- a standardized regulatory document, which aims to align and regulate the process of learning, teaching and evaluation the English language connected with current trends at European level of early English language acquisition.

The learning activities proposed in the English Language Curriculum for 6–7-year-old students included a diversity of integrated, transversal communication techniques, approached through the prism of functionality and action approaches, aiming at the development of integrative skills: listening, comprehension, pronunciation and speaking (producing short oral messages) as a basis for verbal interaction and training specific competencies corresponding to the pre-A1 level [10].

An early stage of learning English in the preschool classroom ensured the gradual development of communicative competence and included the following:

a) the ability to correctly repeat English words from the phonological point of view, foster auditory attention, phonetic hearing and correct pronunciation;

b) the accumulation, consolidation and activation of vocabulary, without which it is impossible to improve speech communication;
c) mastering a certain number of simple grammatical structures; building a coherent utterance, in which speech should be built deliberately since the child uses a limited vocabulary;
d) the ability to speak coherently within certain frameworks of communication.
The curricular contents of Optional English Language Curriculum for Early Education Institutions included basic knowledge of vocabulary, of elementary grammar (nouns, verbs, articles, pronouns, etc.), structured on two areas of communication - oral comprehension and oral production / interaction.

The Optional Foreign Language Curriculum for Early Education Institutions recommended the following thematic organization:
• The child: name, age, body parts, clothes, toys, and games;
• Family: family members;
• House: rooms, furniture, specific activities;
• Weather: seasons, climatic characteristics;
• Natural environment: animals, plants, birds, natural phenomena;
• Current activities: counting, repeating, walking, playing, eating, sleeping, etc. [10].
To teach young learners the researchers used the following set of specific methods [11]:
• *The translation method* is a classic method, with a certain structure, when the content is presented in a certain order, established by the teacher. This method is based primarily on understanding the message and very little on producing messages in the target language. The classical method does not encourage experimental learning.

• *The audio-lingual method* encourages children to learn to use the language in a communicative way, automatically. Vocabulary and grammar are presented in the form of dialogues that are learned through repetition and imitation. Grammar is taught inductively. The exercises that develop the ability to receive the written message and the ability to express the writing are based on communicative activities. The techniques used are dialogues, role-playing games, rehearsals, grammar and vocabulary exercises.

• *Communicative Method-* an approach rather than a method when an emphasis is placed on real communication that focuses on all language skills, not just grammar, being engaging, in the sense that it offers children a functional, living language that can be linked to their direct needs. In this case, the teaching process is focused on the child and on interactivity (teacher-children, child-child interaction), which means that all children are both recipients of messages and especially senders of oral messages, and the activities have a well-defined purpose.

• *Direct method-* its main objective is to teach children to communicate, Translation is not allowed, the teacher uses real-world images, and pantomime; children practice vocabulary in context developing the ability to express themselves orally, the ability to receive the oral message, the ability to receive the written message and the ability to express themselves.

• *The path of silence- When* children have an active role being responsible for their own learning through practice, the main areas of emphasis are pronunciation and grammar. The children develop the ability to express themselves orally, the ability to receive the oral message, the ability to receive the written message and the ability to express themselves in writing.

• *Total physical response-* The ability to receive the oral message develops and also directs children to enjoy the learning experience through guidance, commands and tasks. The children must demonstrate that they have understood the tasks and then to respond nonverbally; later the roles change. The children will talk when they feel ready. The teacher must be tolerant of children's mistakes. The evaluation consists of verifying the comprehension by carrying out selected activities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysing the distribution of the assessments of the research participants, it was found that all pre-schoolers developed listening competency in a proportion of 50%, comprehension in a proportion of 70%, respectively speaking competency in a proportion of 80%; pronunciation in a proportion of 90%, fluency of 40%, and accuracy in a proportion of 30%. We observed that communicative competence has been explored to its maximum potential.

The fundamental goal of learning the English language at the age of 6-7 is to acquire the basic oral communication skills in the English language, necessary to understand and produce short and simple sentences, which would correspond, according to the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, to the Pre-A1 level in oral comprehension and in oral production/interaction. Young learners need very dynamic and various activities during the lesson. Ten minutes is the maximum time frame when pre-schoolers can focus their attention on one type of activity: a bit of enthusiastic singing, a bit of listening, a bit of enthusiastic dancing, and some quiet work of art.
To optimize the level of attention the researchers established the following format:
- Sing. Students sing, recite, or read a passage from the story in teams.
- Listen. Students listen to the story from beginning to end.
- Dance. Students get out of their chairs for some physical activity. Often, this can be acting out the actions from the story, but there are unlimited possibilities.
- Draw. Students sit back down and illustrate new vocabulary.

Games were great strategies to help young students overlook their knowledge in an interactive and fun way. When students learn a new language, they must pronounce a lot of unusual sounds. Singing makes those sounds loud and clear and helps to know how differently stronger and weaker sounds are pronounced in English.

Learning English through storytelling, digital storytelling, and children's literature at an early age gives young learners the possibility to broaden their outlooks, induce their early interest and raise their knowledge of the rich use of English. Stories are undoubtedly an important part of children's literacy [12]. Storytelling and digital storytelling represent a holistic approach to language

teaching and learning founded on the understanding that learners need to interact with rich, authentic examples of the non-native language.

In current practice teaching English to pre-schoolers is a rational combination of relevant educational digital online resources, harmonious combination of modern interactive methods with traditional teaching aids. Teaching English to pre-schoolers is seen as one of the preliminary important steps in preparing the child for school, laying down correct pronunciation, accumulation of vocabulary, ability to understand foreign speech and participate in a simple conversation. Teaching pre-schoolers a foreign language should be communicatively directed and children should be able to use the learned lexical and grammatical material in natural communication contexts.

Bibliography:

[1] I. Guțu, I. (coord.), I. Guțu, D. Munca-Aftenev, et al, Învățământul primar. Curriculum National. Limba străină I. Curriculumul disciplinar. Ghidul de implementare a curriculumului disciplinar. Chișinău, MECC, 2018.

[2] Thesaurus, online dictionary, Accessed 25/06/2021. Retrieved from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/technology

[3] Merriam-Webster dictionary, Accessed 25/06/2021. Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/

[4] A.M. Abunowara, "Using technology in the EFL/ESL Classroom," *International Journal of Humanities* and *Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 7-23, 2016.

[5] R. Raja, P. C. Nagasubramani, "Impact of modern technology in education," *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research, vol. 3,* p.33- 35, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325086709_Impact_of_modern_technology_in_education].

[6] F.A. Akhmedova, "The efficiency of up-to-date pedagogical technologies usage in teaching English," *International Journal of Research and Development*, vol. 5, p.13-15, 2020.

[7] M. M. Bolibekova, S. M. Jalolova, O. N. Nematov, V. A. Tangriyev, "The importance of modern methods and technologies in learning English," *Journal of Critical Reviews,* vol.7 (6), pp. 143-148, 2020.

[8] Center on Technology and Disabilityhttps://www.ctdinstitute.org/content/about-ctd

[9]М.НКотунова,"Современныетехнологииобученияиностранномуязыку,*" Педагогика,*Балаково, 2011.Retreivedfromhttps://gigabaza.ru/doc/75847.html

[10] C. Straistari-Lungu, "Un posibil Curriculum la Limba străină pentru instituțiile de educație timpurie (la vârsta de 6-7 ani)",Conferința "Managementul educațional: realizări și perspective de

dezvoltare"
vol. 3, pp. 356-362, 2020.

[11] C. Straistari-Lungu, "Abordări teoretice privind învățarea limbilor străine în educația timpurie",*Univers Pedagogic*, nr. 4 (64). pp. 24-31, 2019.

[12] C. T. Mart, "Encouraging Young Learners to Learn English through Stories," *English Language Teaching*, vol. 5, nr. 5, pp. 101-106, 2012.