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**"OPEN THE WINDOWS" OF DEEP UNDERSTANDING FOR
CONTEMPORARY ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS**

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Abstract

Contemporary teaching is a mix of pathways carefully projected by a skilful teacher who is not afraid to plunge into the great variety of technological tools in order to enhance proper learning and stimulate high level acquisition. Modern educators should see beyond the gates of traditional training and reinvent methods and techniques that would offer the students the power to build success and become future effective activators on the labour market. However, connecting to the current high level education students is not easy at all; in fact, it is a challenge which needs to be embraced with great courage, involvement, flexibility and more than anything else, willingness to access the complicated digital world, to research and be in constant development from the professional point of view. It is essential for the teacher to find the right resources to draw their attention and engage them in a wide variety of activities. Technology may be of great help in designing attractive and stimulating lessons, in accelerating the language acquisition process. There are numerous aspects contemporary teachers need to deal with. Essentially, the aim of the present paper is to emphasise them, analyse and offer solutions which may lead to a positive teaching act.

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1. Introduction

Digitized development has shaped the whole concept of a lesson, making it more attractive, visually speaking, and easier to acquire. Still, the parts of a lesson are just like the windows of a house, and the English teacher's task is to try and open each one of them to stimulate deep understanding. The choice of curriculum is, especially for Business students who represent the study group on which the present research is based, a compelling issue of thinking for the English teacher. Topics should be derived from real context business situations and should be adapted to the ever changing landscape of the labour market. Moreover, they should be selected in such a way that they would "plant the seeds" in the students' minds for creating future projects where they can come up with ideas, opinions, and realize their visions. Obviously, up-to-date technological tools may be of great help in achieving an attractive framework for the lesson and would remove the "fear" of using them in their upcoming tasks. "Compared with traditional means of teaching, the Web can be a better tool to arouse students' interest in learning English, by incorporating multimedia into tests and exercises in a way that would not be possible on paper. It can stimulate authentic use of the target language and make teaching and learning interactive even after class hours" (Lee, Jor, & Lai, 2005, p.28).

Contemporary adult English learners are struggling nowadays to adapt to the requirements of the new jobs on the international market, which involve, beside technical knowledge, a high level of English. It has thus become, more or less, a sort of condition in targeting high positions. English is, undoubtedly necessary, but the question is: what level should they have exactly?

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Good command of English: a need or a must?

In the business field, communication is of utmost importance; therefore, strong attention should be paid to develop proficiency in English. Most higher education students are aware of the benefits and positive contributions the mastering of a foreign language can bring to their lives. They generally manifest great interest in acquiring it for various reasons: career prospects, travelling, socializing, applying for various prestigious universities worldwide, attending international events, understanding WebPages and the list can continue. From all of them, the most compelling and stimulating, is the desire to find a job. A lot of countries have opened their borders for employees from all over the world, and English has become a common language of communication. More and more employers are looking for people who are well trained not only in the technical or non-technical field but for those who can easily support conversations in English. Some of them ask for certificates which prove the level candidates have, at all the four skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking. Depending on the job, applicants sometimes opt for taking exams. Typical ones include:

TOEFL - Test of English as a foreign language- is a test of an individual's ability to use and understand English in an academic setting.

IELTS – International English Language Testing System - the world's leading English test for migration and higher education

TOEIC – Test of English for International Communication - is a test of English for communication and it's usually used for business

OPI – Oral Proficiency Interview – is a live, 15-30 minute telephone conversation between a certified ACTFL tester and the candidate. It is a valid and reliable test that measures how well a person speaks (www.languageesting.com); OPIC is an internet delivered test that provides valid and reliable oral proficiency testing.

PET – Preliminary English Test – an English language exam that shows you have mastered the basics

FCE – First Certificate in English – shows that learners have the language skills needed to communicate confidently in an English-speaking environment (www.wikipedia.org)

CAE – Certificate for learners in Advanced English – is proof of high level achievement in English and is designed for learners preparing for university or professional life

BEC - Business English Certificate - are tests designed for individuals who study business

CPE - Cambridge English Proficiency - is a test which "proves you can communicate with the fluency and sophistication of a highly competent English speaker".

There are, for sure, other English courses which students can opt for in order to obtain a Certificate. Private language schools also provide training in the field; however, the above mentioned exams, are more required and appreciated by employers. Thus, getting students in touch with the range of English exams which may offer them an authentic certificate of the level they possess is fundamental and offers them a target to attain. Well-conceived and focused on real-life situations, such exams connect them to the reality of the present labour market and develop their practical abilities of using a foreign language. The actual curriculum should include a presentation of the options they have and lessons should follow this direction whenever possible. Students need to be stimulated to reach the highest level possible because the demands have increased and great emphasis is placed on good command of English. It is no longer a basic need; it is a "must" of the current employment market. Preparation for these exams may be supported by useful websites (www.lingoda.com; www.businessenglishpod.com; www.businessenglishsite.com/ www.bbc.co.uk/ <http://breakingnewsenglish.com/> www.kaplaninternational.com/business, etc.

The English teacher could suggest some of the most efficient ones but bringing into discussion this aspect, students may come up with a lot of other online tools, videos, presentations or sites which may contribute to the development of their language abilities.

"Instructors can use digital media to help learners develop language skills in tandem with fostering their autonomy and creativity and with preparing them to engage in and communicate with others outside of the classroom" (Alsagoff, McKay, Hu, & Renadya, 2012, p. 33).

2.2. The Dark Side of Teaching English through Technology

The teaching process is nowadays majorly influenced by technology. "The way we use technology for teaching and learning can have a significant impact on the way that learners work and learn; you might help learners to find things out for themselves and spend less time explaining, or you might expect learners to take more control of their learning while you offer guidance and support". (www.thedigitalteacher.com)

The positive side of teaching English using technology is obvious; teachers can use their mobile phones to play listening materials, can send instructional materials via email, what's app or other

applications, can use a video projector to present the entire lesson or other video materials, can use computers for interactive activities, etc.

Still, teachers should have in view the drawbacks that using technological devices may sometimes generates. When it comes to teaching, they may be regarded as extremely useful instruments but in the students' hands, they are not always used in a positive direction. Checking social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. is such a common practice in our days that it happens frequently even during lessons. Wireless connection or easy Internet access have facilitated permanent connection to all communication sites and draw students' attention despite the attractiveness of a carefully designed lesson. Thus, this may often lead to disconnected students and may distance them from the core of the taught materials. Likewise, sometimes universities don't benefit of highly equipped labs or good Internet connection. Other drawbacks of the teaching act with the help of technology refer to the speed of "spreading" information and the big amount of knowledge provided. The lesson projected on the screen may be an advantage for visual learners; still not even then can remember details when pages succeed one after the other. Significant information may be lost, especially in the case of a foreign language.

"Although using computer multimedia in English teaching can save the time when the teachers explain the content and write on the blackboard, accelerate teaching rhythm and increase the density of propagating classroom information, sometimes, the condition that haste makes waste also occurs. In classroom, the teachers use screen presentation instead of writing on the blackboard, click the mouse, along with explanation, keeping lively rhythm. Presentation one page by one page cannot ensure enough visual residence time for the students. Frequently, the students look the latter pages and forget the front pages so that they do not have time to sublime seen substantive knowledge to rational knowledge " (Wang & Yuanzi, 2011,p.143).

3. Research Questions

Teaching English by using technology enhances deep understanding and ensures an on-going gradual process of development. In fact, the entire teaching process has been lately reshaped or better said "reformed" in the sense that a "virtual" lesson may provide authentic contexts, high quality materials, a challenging and stimulating experience. Students, generally, appreciate a lesson centred on technology because they are familiarised with it; however, it is the teacher who decides the extent to which it is incorporated in a lesson; technology enriches the content of the lesson, makes it visually attractive and brings a great deal of fun but the teacher is the person who "guides" the entire process in the right direction to leave students the opportunity to use their creativity and to interact with each other and with the teacher, to analyze and synthesize. The teacher should design a digital lesson tailored to the needs and learning styles of the students and make sure that a "contact" is somehow maintained with the students, that it is a human not a mechanical act, that there is a certain degree of flexibility. In other words, the teacher "models" the lesson with the help of technological tools and adapts it in accordance with the students' interests, goals and level of English.

"There is little doubt that new technologies open up possibilities unheard of in previous eras. But these technologies will have only limited impact if the pedagogy behind their application does not keep pace. Technology is nothing without a teacher and a plan"(Lewis & Gordon, 2009, p.4).

The teacher remains the major resource for students; his/her professionalism determines the quality of the teaching act and it's up to him/her to maximize the students' opportunities to use English in a proficient way. He/she should offer guidance during the class but also online, if possible. Although current students use Internet frequently, they are not quite familiarized with the English exams that they could take to boost the chances of getting a job or other issues related to acquiring English. I personally became aware of their opinions as a result of a short survey that I conducted on my Business English Students.

1. How do you rank the importance of being proficient in English?
2. How familiar are you with the tests that you can take to obtain a valid and valuable English Certificate?
3. What are the basic on line sites that you use to improve your English level?
4. How much of your free time do you devote to studying English individually on line?
5. Does technology make the English class more attractive?
6. Does technology enhance language acquisition faster?
7. Have you ever used social networking sites during English classes?
8. Which of the following electronic devices do you use the most to improve your English skills: mobile phone, laptop, tablet, iPad, e-reader, TV program etc.?
9. Which of the four language skills is the most difficult to master?
10. Traditional teacher, modern teacher, digital one or a mix?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the degree to which students are conscious of the possible exams or tests which may help them in their future careers and the way they perceive the use of technology in acquiring English during the lessons and in their free time

5. Research Methods

The main research methods involved in the present study were: direct questioning, monitoring students' reaction during classes and conducting a survey.

6. Findings

The results of the survey showed that, surprisingly, not so many students knew about the tests or exams they could take for being successful in their future careers, but they really manifested a great deal of enthusiasm to find out details about them; they showed much interest when English was taught by using technology. They proved that they were familiarised with a lot of English websites and that they used them while studying at home. Mobile phone was "declared" the most used electronic device when it came to access English online resources, followed by laptop and tablet but they also admitted that they had used it from time to time to check their friends' postings while being in class. It was not because they were bored or uninterested in the topic; their explanation was that it became a routine, a habit to permanently keep in touch with those around them. As for technology, they recognized its importance in developing English skills; however they found it hard to become proficient speakers, to communicate fluently without the help of the teacher. They admitted that the presence of a teacher is necessary for correction, emotional support

when they encounter “language obstacles” or for explanations. They all agreed on the importance of mastering English at a high level.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, I think that students nowadays are aware of the importance of being proficient in English and of the necessity of digital technology in the process of acquiring a foreign language but they need online orientation towards sites which may contribute to their fast development of the language skills and the constant support of a dedicated teacher for overcoming “language barriers”, for explanations and for support.

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