

USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE LEARNING

Домбровская Наталья Александровна

Могилевский государственный университет имени А.А. Кулешова
(г. Могилев, Беларусь)

Статья посвящена использованию информационных технологий при организации самостоятельной работы студентов, изучающих иностранный язык на неязыковых факультетах. Применение интернет ресурсов и сервисов может повысить эффективность изучения языка, мотивацию. Роль преподавателя при этом сводится к контролю, что повышает автономию

Nowadays more and more attention is being paid to students' independent work in the process of learning. In the past the teacher used to be the key person in education. Now we focus on the student-centred approach. Students are supposed to develop their autonomy and independence, thus they bear responsibility for their academic progress. It is crucial as education is not just an amount of knowledge. It encompasses a lot of skills, critical thinking, creativity which are so demanded in the current ever-changing world. And one of the ways of empowering students and developing their autonomy is the use of information technology. The Internet with its vast opportunities, including social networks, has become an essential part of people's daily activities. So it is essential that teachers should incorporate information technology into teaching languages to students who are the most advanced users of all modern gadgets. The teacher's role is to think how they should incorporate information technology resources into language learning and teaching so that their role is reduced to supervision and students' autonomy is enhanced.

One of the simplest ways of implementing this task is to use email. You can use it as a means of communication with students. It may be setting homework by email, students' returning the assignment via email, the teacher's providing them with feedback. Students can be asked to get in touch with various organizations to obtain relevant information (facts, figures, prices, terms, etc.) required for a large-scale

project. It may be followed by processing and summarizing the data and making a PowerPoint presentation which is to be sent to the teacher by email.

For example, when I teach first-year students who major in programming and we work on the topic “My Future Profession”, I ask them to send their CVs and cover letters to potential employers describing their educational background and experience of programming. First, they do some research what companies they can apply to, study where they operate, what they specialize in, what they can offer to employees. They may start with looking through job advertisements which are in abundance on the Internet. Such sites as Total jobs have several hundred up-to-date job ads. Then they make up a CV and a cover letter specific to that application thinking over their personal and professional strengths, how they can benefit the company, what makes them a good candidate for a job. If they send their CVs and cover letters to real employers, they can even be invited to a job interview. While doing this assignment, students enrich their vocabulary, get aware of some new realities concerning the process of job hunting and the world of programming on the whole. No doubt that it motivates students, makes them more ambitious in language learning. It can also make them think consciously about their future career and its prospects.

You can also keep students informed on a wide range of issues with the help of email. They can be related to the topic you are working on at the moment or can be of general interest. In the latter case, the teacher can recommend a recent film or a book. But most often it seems more relevant to inform students of something that has to do with the topic they are working on in class. While studying the topic “The Republic of Belarus”, the teacher may send students the latest news in various spheres of life, e.g. economy, culture, business, science, education. Students may be asked to outline the news and comment on it. This task takes quite a lot of time so it is more preferable to do it at home and send to the teacher for evaluation than in class. Besides I can not but mention that there are always some students who may be shy and lack confidence to express their thoughts and ideas in the presence of their group mates. So the format of communication via email with the teacher lets them be heard, which raises their self-esteem and in the long run can let them participate in class activities more freely.

As it has already been mentioned, the Internet has an enormous potential, which can benefit you if the process of learning is rationally organized. First of all, it must be admitted that specific websites devoted to teaching English are of major importance. Many of them have interactive multiple-choice tasks so students can get instant feedback having completed them. The discussion forum is another popular tool. Teachers and students post messages which others can read and reply to. Here we come across the best and at the same time the worst about the Internet. Anyone can upload their work. As a result one may find materials which are either methodologically unsound or linguistically incorrect. Besides, students must be

ready to face some hostility or at least criticism to their postings. There is a simple solution to this problem. It seems reasonable for students to choose a specific forum recommended by the teacher. It will hardly prevent them from being criticized but at least it will enable the teacher to read students' postings and correct their mistakes either in class or by email.

Another task which requires using the web resources and opportunities and also stimulates students' interest in language learning expands their knowledge about the United Kingdom. It can also have a cultural effect breaking some stereotypes about the country and its people and borders between the two countries. There is access to various resources related to the UK. Students may be asked to work out an itinerary of a trip around the country. They are supposed to visit the websites of the hotels they are planning to stay at, the sites of the museums, various landmarks they want to visit. They are also to think about the means of transport, food, communication with local people, etc. This work is carried out in a team. So students have to distribute their tasks, set deadlines for different activities, evaluate various options and choose the best ones.

News websites make another great resource for learning and teaching English. It can especially benefit those students who major in journalism. Students can comment on the latest news or they may study how one event is covered at various news websites and make some conclusions concerning this particular event and a journalist's job in general. News sites always have forums which provide students with an opportunity to express their opinions on the issues featured and practice the language in the real world.

Teachers of English can not ignore opportunities that YouTube gives to them. Its unlimited potential may be used to develop students' oral comprehension skills, speaking skills, to improve their pronunciation and to enrich their vocabulary. There are videos on every subject under the sun. They are documentaries, feature films, TV programmes, vlogs, etc. The teacher may choose a relevant video and use it in class. Students may be required to write an essay on the problem raised in the video. Authentic videos can illustrate students' different linguistic aspects. They may compare the British and the American variants of the English language, draw students' attention to phonetic, grammar and vocabulary differences. Students also get more aware of the current changes in the language, its slang in particular. They may be exposed to the real life situations concerning their major, their future career. For instance, it is interesting for law students to watch a trial video. It can be a TV show or a real trial. Students are asked to describe the court room, the participants of the trial, their actions, speech, non-verbal ways of communicating, to comment on the verdict, express their own opinion whether it is fair or not and explain why they think so. The most challenging follow-up activity is to role-play a trial similar to the one they have watched. It takes a lot of time and effort but it is a very efficient means of improving speaking skills, activating juridical vocabulary, motivating students to keep up their English.

Different techniques and ways may be used to incorporate information technology into independent learning of English. Their usage depends on learners' language proficiency, the purpose of learning the language, topics and some other factors. The teacher's role is minimized with the emphasis on supervision. It makes students feel more responsible for their own progress and raises their internal motivation in language learning.