The Influence of New Media Tools in ESP Teaching:
Case Study on Business English

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at analyzing the role played by new media tools in ESP teaching, with an emphasis on business English. The paper is divided into two main sections, i.e. a theoretical and a practical one. The first section provides a short introduction to the basic theoretical aspects of the notion of new media and its tools, and it also briefly presents several Internet-based activities. Furthermore, it underlines that teachers should be aware of several issues related to the use of the Internet in the classroom. The second section designs an experiment related to the use of new media tools in the ESP seminar, aimed at increasing student participation, granting learners a more active role in the learning process and contributing to the enhancement of their ESP skills. Moreover, this experiment also professes the idea that new media tools can strengthen the collaboration among students and enable teachers to work more as facilitators/ consultants, encouraging communication in the ESP seminars.

1. Introduction

In general, language learning involves two main "actors", i.e. the teacher and his/her students, and a "stage", i.e. usually the classroom. However, technological development – especially in the field of information technology – and the increasingly easy Internet access have engendered virtual learning environments and new learning experiences. Consequently, learners of all ages have been given endless occasions to attend various lessons, courses or trainings from different locations, whenever they want, as their teacher or trainer is only a click away.

According to Vizental (2008, p.39), teachers' roles are nowadays different (compared to the ones starring on traditional classroom stages):

"In the age of information, teachers must relinquish their traditional, central, authoritative place in the classroom, and they must cease to be the source of information: the teacher's new role is that of go-between the student and the learning process. Students should be helped to link the learning material to their own lives and internalize it as personal experience. The student becomes a researcher and a discoverer."

Therefore, great emphasis falls on interaction and on the exchange and negotiation of ideas. The above-mentioned scholar stresses the importance of the students' intention/ desire to communicate and get involved in various exchanges (Vizental, 2008, p.214). For this purpose, teachers should present students interesting topics and design attractive activities, stirring their imagination, creativity and language production.

Some authors, such as Schmidt et al. (2013, p.3), explain that the rapid and easy Internet access has triggered global social, cultural and political transformations, especially in the field of communication. Thus, online communication is nowadays part of our daily interactions and information is disseminated at an extremely rapid pace. Another scholar, Suzie Boss (2010; 2011), professes that the employment of new media tools in education provide opportunities for students to question traditional teacher-centered learning models, by sharing and discussing their opinions

outside the classroom and even at great distances. Due to digital technologies, students are able to get more new pieces of information than they do from their teacher in the classroom. Thus, learning in an online environment can contribute to the improvement of the target language and to the development of intercultural and communicative skills; it can also encourage the student's independence.

Although the use of new digital media tools has always represented a challenge, it can offer both teachers and students a great variety of creative and practical ideas. Moreover, it can enable teachers to meet the students' various needs and interests and to provide them with many interesting and entertaining language practice activities and tasks that develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, also encouraging them to practice these skills in general, outside the classroom (see Meidasari, 2016). Nowadays, an infinite number of resources provide a great variety of learning and discovery paths. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Harmer (2007, p.176) warns teachers not to consider them as learning methodologies, but rather as auxiliary tools of their teaching approaches.

2. Theoretical background - The notion of new digital media

James (2009, p.49) defines new digital media as "the actual technologies that people use to connect with one another—including mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), game consoles, and computers connected to the Internet". According to Meidasari (2016), these technologies involve young people in a range of activities, such "social networking, blogging, gaming, instant messaging, downloading music and other content, uploading and sharing their creations, and collaborating with others in various ways" (p. 78). In their turn, Ito et al (2009, p.3) explain that new media are used in order to "describe media ecology where more traditional media, such as books, television, and radio, are converging with digital media, specifically interactive media and media for social communication". Therefore, according to the above-mentioned authors, new media include a large variety of tools and transformations in terms of media technology, which cannot be seen only as mere technical characteristics.

In general, the term new media is used in order to make reference to all those means of communication, representation and knowledge, characterized by signal digitalization and endowed with content dominated by multimodality and interactivity (therefore, it includes everything from the mobile phone to digital television, also including game consoles and the Internet). The new media tools are extremely useful especially in mediating communication, incorporating new technological dimensions, combining interpersonal communication and mass media dimensions, etc. Ito et al. (2009, p.13) underline that the distinction between "old" and "new" media is only temporary, because, in the future, all media will turn into new media. According to these authors, the Internet is both a new medium and a technology whereby all the other media and communication modes interact through the establishment of digital or analogue connections (Ito et al., 2009, p.19).

3. Instances of Internet-based media tools that can be used in the ESP seminar

Social networking sites, such as *MySpace*, *Twitter* and *Facebook*, along with video counterparts like *YouTube* (allowing users to watch videos and upload videos of their own recordings), play an important part in asynchronous communication (Baron, 2008, p.110). For instance, *YouTube*, whose slogan (i.e. "Broadcast yourself") suggests that its services are dedicated to ordinary individuals who want to publish videos they have created, is also used by companies and organizations to promote their businesses. However, an extremely large number of *YouTube* videos (e.g. amateur films, music videos, tutorials or instructional videos, do-it-yourself guides, various funny events, etc.) are created and uploaded by amateurs from all over the world, from various backgrounds.

Another online community, which is dedicated to language enthusiasts that help each other learn and master a foreign language (for instance, by leaving comments in response to exercise practice, by building mini-lessons within exercise feedback, by having conversations on different

topics or by providing language practice and culture tips, etc.), is *Livemocha*. In its turn, *Wiki* enables individuals to edit a document or to add new content to it, operating on collaborative trust (Baron 2008, p.116). These features transformed *Wikis* into a common tool in offices and organizations, employed in drafting joint projects. A well-known example of a *Wiki* website is *Wikipedia*.

Blogs, which are predominantly text-based and published for various reasons (such as to document or to share one's personal experiences; to stay in touch with one's friends and family; to share one's practical knowledge or skills – see Baron, 2008, p.111-112), reaching many people simultaneously, also represent an interesting Internet-based instrument very useful in the ESP seminar. Blogs "attract" readers (as one can find them on his/her own and choose to open or to ignore them), while email or instant messaging are seen as "push" media tools because they show up uninvited on one's electronic device or computer.

4. Using new media as learning tools in the ESP classroom: practical suggestions

One of the greatest challenges faced by the ESP teacher, in the academic environment, is represented by the fact that s/he has to teach students with different backgrounds, abilities and proficiency levels. Moreover, s/he should carefully choose the ESP content, so as to fit the students' field(s) of study, and be able to face various challenges triggered by the specialized terminology featuring in the respective content (see Chirobocea, 2016). Therefore, the ESP teacher must design various learning options and flexible and motivational activities, and provide students with material, according to their needs and interests. The Internet is packed with ideas to get the students involved in communicative activities, using new media tools. According to Harmer (2007, p.69), the main advantage is represented by the plentiful exposure to language in use; new media tools provide a wide range of language practice opportunities, which are vitally important for a student's development of ESP knowledge and skills.

In her turn, Suzie Boss (2010; 2017), an edutopia.org blogger, states that a strong classroom culture is beneficial to all students, irrespective of their age. Icebreaker activities, such as name games or brainstorming activities are widely used at the beginning of the school/ academic year, contributing to the architecture of a positive and trustworthy learning community. The blogger's advice is that teachers should update this tradition and make it more attractive by employing new media tools and low-tech activities, which will enhance the students' teamwork skills and creativity, from the very beginning.

In addition, Boss (2010; 2011) gives practical suggestions of tools that can be used in class, such as: *Wallwisher* (see http://wallwisher.com), a user-friendly brainstorming and feedback-gathering tool; *AnswerGarden* (see http://answergarden.ch) – a fast response-gathering online tool, which does not require registration; *VoiceThread* (see http://voicethread.com) – which can help teachers and students get better acquainted, allowing the combination of photographs or of other visual items with written/ audio comments. *VoiceThread* can also be employed as an activity involving the entire class (i.e. the teacher can ask his/her students to share a digital album in order to introduce themselves to their classmates, or s/he can ask them to record audio comments about themselves). Another interesting tool is *Glogster EDU* (see http://edu.glogster.com/), which designs multimedia posters, by incorporating various items, such as texts, graphics, pictures, links, audio, video, etc. Moreover, since students can employ these online posters in order to combine and sort digital content, *Glogster* can be utilized in the organization and development of big projects.

Last but not least, social media tools, such as *Edmodo, Facebook* or *Twitter* can also raise the students' interest. In "5 Ultimate Tricks of Using Social Media as Learning Tools", blogger Stephanie Norman (2016) emphasizes that an increasing number of students consider that social media, such as *Facebook*, can make the learning process more appealing and fun. In this regard, teachers can gradually use social media in order to create groups, ask questions and post various messages or links to various e-books, articles, videos, etc. These strategies – involving the use of the new media as learning tools – are likely to raise the students' enthusiasm and trigger better learning results.

Teachers should provide many opportunities for learning experiences, encouraging students to get information from a large variety of sources. Having in view that students enjoy discovering new things and respond well to being asked to use their creativity by various means, especially by involving visual aids (see Nadrag, 2018) and new media, a performant ESP seminar should also provide an atmosphere of cheerful and supportive harmony. Thus, adapting ESP lessons to these modern learning styles and using the new media in the ESP seminar can have a great impact upon students, providing for new communication opportunities, encouraging collaborative learning and critical and creative thinking.

5. Research methodology and expected results

In second semester of the academic year 2019-2010, I intend to conduct a study on the effects of the use of new media tools in the ESP seminar, as far as the development of the students' writing and speaking skills are concerned, with special emphasis on business English. Thus, the hypothesis underlying my study will be based on the idea that the use of new media tools in the ESP seminar will contribute to the enhancement of the students' writing and speaking skills and it will motivate their learning.

I chose to conduct this study together with the students majoring in Economics and International Affairs, second year of study. For this purpose, I will divide the students into two main groups, i.e. a control group and an experimental one. Both groups will be taught the same ESP content, i.e. "Jobs, People and Organizations": "Work and Organizations", "Recruitment and Selection", "Skills and Qualifications", "Pay and Benefits", "Managers, Executives and Directors", "Businesspeople and Business leaders", "Organizations"), for four weeks. It should be mentioned that the ESP content will largely based on Bill Mascull's book, *Business Vocabulary in Use* (2002) and on Carmen Liliana Maruntelu's *Course in Business Communication* (2007). However, with the students from the control group, I will use traditional teaching methods, strategies and techniques, while the students from the experimental group will become acquainted with several new media teaching tools.

As far as the data collection instruments are concerned, I will have in view the following: the initial test, the observation of students' activity and attendance during the experiment, the final test, and statistical data (in terms of the students' age, gender, previous educational background). The initial test will aim at establishing the student's English language proficiency level. The results of this test will underlie the distribution of students in the two groups (i.e. the control group and the experimental group), in order to obtain two heterogeneous groups, with similar English proficiency levels. During the entire study period, I will observe and register the students' reactions and involvement degree in the ESP activities (i.e. attendance, motivation, initiative, active participation, task achievement level, etc.). The success of the new media tools will be underlined by the students' high level of participation and interest in the ESP activities.

The ESP content will be distributed into two lessons, one dealing with jobs, recruitment and remuneration and the other focusing on managers, businesspeople and organizations. Each lesson will consist of several sections with the same key features: presentation of the new language items, dialogues and activities. The new language items will be presented and highlighted in various contexts, depending on the teaching approach used with each group (i.e. the control group and the experimental group). In general, I will also introduce students to short dialogues or texts or ask them to integrate the new vocabulary items into dialogues/ texts of their own, aimed at gradually improving their speaking skills. The ESP activities will involve pair and small group work (see Maruntelu 2006), matching exercises, gap filling tasks, error correction exercises, crosswords, brainstorming, etc., focused on the use of new language items in meaningful contexts and in accordance with the teaching approaches and strategies employed for the two groups involved in this experiment.

For the control group, I will design task-based learning activities (based on Nunan, 2004). First, the students will be provided with the new language items (as pre-tasks), but the emphasis of the learning process will fall on the performance of tasks, followed by the discussion of the respective language items and corrections, if necessary. Commands, repetition, drilling, question-answer exchanges (based on texts or on dialogues) are among the techniques that will be employed at the

ESP seminar designed for the control group.

As far as the experimental group is concerned, I will use a communicative, student-centered approach (see Nadrag, 2013) and new media tools, aimed at developing the students' speaking and writing skills, the emphasis falling more on language functions and interactions, and on the students' learning needs and interest, within a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. I will create a social media group with the students from the experimental group and use it in order to post various ESP exercises, videos, pictures and pieces of information, all related to the topics debated at seminars. I will also encourage (and, at some point, even require) students to post their own videos or pictures (connected to the respective topics) and/or to comment upon the items posted by me or by their classmates. Moreover, brainstorming, online discovery activities, online crosswords, word games and quizzes, information-gap filling activities (preceding writing activities), writing short paragraphs on various topics (using the newly taught language items), listening short sequences for gap filling or for specific information, watching short videos (also for gap filling or for extracting specific pieces of information) are some of the techniques that I will use during the ESP seminars attended by the students from the experimental group. Thus, students will discover new ways of learning business English by playing various online games or by solving online exercises, quizzes and crosswords, which will also entail enjoyment, motivation, problem solving skills, interaction.

As far as the final test is concerned, it will be administered at the end of the experiment period and it aims at verifying the students' evolution in terms of language acquisition and development of their speaking and writing skills (by comparing the grades obtained at the initial test with the final test grades). This test will also check the efficiency of the new media tools in the ESP classroom (by comparing the results obtained by the control group with the grades obtained by the experimental group). It is noteworthy that the final test items will be selected from the materials employed in the ESP classroom. If the experimental students' outcomes are better than those of the control students, the hypothesis of the study will be validated.

6. Conclusion

The comparative results of the experiment are likely to show that the students from the experimental group will enjoy the new media tools used in the ESP seminar, triggering positive attitudes, increased motivation and a high degree of active participation, encouraging them to speak and write in English, contributing thus to the development of theie productive skills (i.e. speaking and writing). It should be noted that the success of using new media tools in the ESP seminar is likely to be enhanced by the student-centered approach, where students are provided with interaction opportunities and encouraged to produce their own language, the teacher playing the role of a facilitator of the leaning process. Having in view that the new tasks will be designed so as to meet the students' interests and needs (dealing thus with individualization), these beneficiaries of the learning process will appreciate more the ESP activities, which will also keep them engaged in the learning process. Moreover, the new media tools will provide students more access to individual extensive learning, also boosting their interest for self instruction, encouraging them to continue their learning outside the seminar. For instance, students usually find it easier to learn new words, by simply clicking on a corresponding picture to see their definitions or to practice reading on their own. Furthermore, word pronunciation and meanings, various definitions or any additional pieces of information are just a click away; multimedia tools can support their understanding of the newly taught language items and improve their speaking and writing skills, in terms of business English.

Therefore, by integrating new media tools in the ESP seminar, the teaching and learning processes will become more flexible experiences, their facilitator (i.e. the teacher) being able to adapt them to the students' learning styles, pace, interests and needs, boosting their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that new media also poses some challenges for teachers, having in view the overwhelming variety of teaching sources and materials but also the fact that some of them may not be trustworthy. Thus, teacher should be able to discern the right from the inappropriate ones and select only those tools that fit the teaching content, the teaching approach

and its objectives and also the students' needs and interests. All in all, we strongly believe that despite all these challenges, the advantages triggered by the use of the new media tools in the ESP seminar will surpass the difficulties, and an appropriate planning will reduce these drawbacks, transforming new media into efficient ESP teaching and learning instruments.

7. References

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