



Kazakhstan's Practices of Using Digital Tools in Teaching English Online

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Abstract

The article describes digital tools used in practical English classes. The recent global events such as COVID-19 has proved the humanity how important online education is. When the most educational arena is shifting to online learning, digital tools play a huge role for creating learning content, electronic educational resources and distance learning courses. In practical English classes, digital tools are used to prepare lessons and teaching materials, create tests to assess the knowledge acquired, as well as to record audio and video materials for listening. The author presents various types of work for the formation of skills in all kinds of speech activities (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and identifies the advantages of digital tools (Google Classroom, YouTube, Padlet, Mentimeter, Edpuzzle, Calameo, Quizlet). The considered digital tools help to create interactive tasks online, develop new pedagogical approaches to the organization of the learning process, objectively assess knowledge and continuously monitor the results of the study group, to exchange information and tasks between students and teachers, to simplify the process of preparing for classes.

Keywords: digital tools, teaching English, distance learning, online, e-learning

Introduction

Within the last three years every person in the world has evidenced the world pandemic bearing the name of COVID-19. It is obvious that in many countries educational systems were not ready to shift to distance (online) learning; the pandemic has revealed vulnerabilities. However, to be positive in this sense, we can observe that forced massive shift from traditional learning and teaching promoted advancement of IT competences in education. Educational institutions and authorities came to rethinking of teaching techniques and reimagining of learning strategies.

The practical significance of this article is due to the process of modernization of the educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan in connection with the transition to distance learning and the use of new information technologies. The active use and introduction of new information technologies in the educational process involves the development of information and communication competencies, organization of independent work, independent critical thinking, formation of abilities and skills necessary to carry out professional activities.

Improvement of information technologies requires changes not only in general education process, but also in all spheres of human activity. In the period of the pandemic, no sphere of activity could be without mobile digital devices. The use of digital devices implies personal and constant accessibility, the ability to save information, search and process educational information, interactive and multimedia applications, planning tasks, connecting to other additional devices.

Distance learning (online learning) provides a tremendous opportunity to use digital technology for learning compared to the traditional form of learning. Online learning presents advantages such as the teacher and students working together on an interactive whiteboard, group work, presentation of individual works, and oral presentation. In short, the learning process is represented by interactive forms and different types of work. In addition, classes in online format provide ample opportunities to simultaneously use multiple Learning Management System (LMS) platforms to shape all kinds of speech activities. The key principles of an LMS (Learning Management System) are learning, management, and e-system.

LMS makes it possible to create one unified system or a framework for training to place training materials (schedule of classes and examinations, electronic magazine, achievements, working curricula, syllabi and case studies) to maintain and improve the internal expertise of the institution. Learning Management System of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University uses *Platonus*, an automated system which allows following the properly organized learning process and solve daily problems.



The advantage of Platonus system is automation of all routine processes, assigning courses, defining disciplines, providing complete information on teaching materials, notifying students and teachers about upcoming deadlines, access to a single database from any digital device (teachers-students-parents), scoring students in all disciplines, tracking student progress, downloading and correcting curricula.

The creation of LMS occurred in the second half of the XX century in the educational system. The purpose of creating LMS is a simple and clear organization of the educational process and the provision of educational resources in both distance and traditional learning format [1]. It is interesting that distance learning originated as early as 1728, when an American professor Caleb Phillips organized correspondence courses, sending out an ad for students from anywhere in the country [2].

Research methods

The research article aimed at making a survey and analysis of current publications, open data and information about the used and existing digital educational tools. As part of this work, the study was carried out by systematic methods, a comparative analysis of existing solutions to the identified problems was used. Information about each of the educational environments and platforms was structured and listed, and also the benefits and advantages of the use of such platforms was discussed.

The aim of the work was to establish an evolutionary change in the role of the teacher in the educational process with the condition of using educational digital tools. The methodology of this work consisted in the review and analysis of literary sources on the research interest.

Discussion

Distance learning is a specific form of education, as it involves the main reliance on the means of new information and communication technologies, multimedia, means of video communications, another form of interaction between the teacher and students, students with each other. Such type of learning is based on advanced information technology, the use of which provides fast and flexible adaptation to the changing needs of the student [3].

The main characteristic of distance learning is the opportunity to get educational services without attending an educational institution, due to arrangement of communication and learning process between the teacher and students via Internet. The organization of distance learning in the network implies active use of modern digital tools that allow interaction both with the teacher-coordinator and with other participants in the educational process.

Digital tools in education are a subgroup of digital technologies that are being developed to improve the quality, speed and attractiveness of information transfer in teaching and learning [4]. These include:

- E-learning systems: Google Classroom, Stepik, Coursera, Canvas, Udemy, etc.
- Social networks: Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, tiktok, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, etc.
- Video services: Youtube, Aitube, Kaztube;
- Infographic platforms: Piktochart, Canva, PosterMyWall, DesignCap, Easel.ly, Hohli, Wordle, etc.
- Game-based learning resources: LearningApps, Telltale, [Institute of Play](#), [OER Commons](#) etc.

The purpose of creating such resources is to simplify the process of monitoring learning outcomes and progress, increase the interest, motivation and involvement of children in the learning process due to the diversity forms of obtaining, reproduction, analysis and application of knowledge, which makes education open and accessible. The main goal of using digital tools in education is to make it better in quality. For effective use of digital tools, teachers need to know their functional and pedagogical capabilities and be able to apply them correctly in the learning process. Below are the key features of digital tools:

1. Communicate important educational information to students and parents. In any learning format, the teacher remains the leader and manager of the classroom, which means presenting and gathering organizational information. Forums, messengers, and virtual whiteboards help the teacher communicate with students, remind them of important events and also keep in touch with students' parents.

2. Creating comfortable conditions for distance learning. Comfortable conditions in the process of distance learning is when all participants of the process exchange information in time, without damage to health and privacy, with the benefit of development. In this case it is possible to use chat



rooms in social networks, functions of notification and storage of files in electronic learning systems and diverse video libraries of the Internet.

3. Support for emotional connection with students. Social media and messengers, video conferencing, virtual whiteboards, cloud storage, and forums serve to support emotional connection with students.

4. Developing student interest, engagement, and passion. Interest in learning grows when a student can play, choose, experience the joy of discovery, and foster independence. To attract students' attention, to increase their interest, the teacher is helped by digital tools that are implemented in the form of games.

5. Development of own professional freedom. The freedom of a teacher and an educator is such a set of skills and knowledge, which allows solving educational tasks depending on the requests and level of students' enthusiasm. There are always children in the classroom who only want a basic level of subject matter, but there are also those who aspire to win the All-Russian Olympiad [5].

Nowadays, after the pandemic and the current situation all over the world uses the most popular tools for learning management system such as Google Classroom, YouTube, Padlet, Mentimeter, Edpuzzle, Calameo, Quizlet, etc.

In distance learning, the teacher has the opportunity to use several digital tools simultaneously. I.V. Fedorova notes that the right combination of forms and methods of learning allows developing personal potential of students, increase involvement in learning a foreign language, improve academic performance, motivate students with a variety of forms and learning materials [6].

One of the advanced tools is Google Classroom, which is integrated with other apps like Google Disc, G-mail, YouTube, Duo, Meet, Hangouts, Jamboard. Thus, Google Classroom allows the teacher to organize a lesson using the applications presented. The teacher has the ability to create a specific individual class to teach students, send assignments, organize master classes and discussions, perform individual and group assignments in the system and attach the completed work, evaluate the work, send feedback to students to make corrections, write comments, and grade (assess). In addition, all assignments are saved in Google Drive and can be viewed or repeated at any time passed material (see Figure 1).

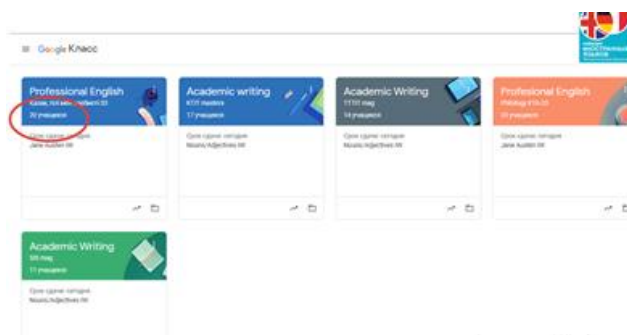


Figure 1 - Shaping classes in Google Classroom

The functionality of digital tools provides for the development of all language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). YouTube is used at every lesson to form the skills and develop the skills of speech perception by ear. Audiovisual form of learning is one of the effective forms of learning activities, as the video contains visual information (scene, appearance of the situation, non-verbal behavior of the participants, gestures, facial expressions). In English language teaching, YouTube contains a huge amount of didactical videos like short video lessons explaining grammar rules, discussions on lexical topics, dialogues with native speakers, phonetic exercises for pronunciation of words, professional materials for self-improvement, and news.

Another platform – Padlet – allows creating a collection of visual bookmarks for self-study in an online format. Visual bookmarks act as a notebook for the materials necessary (see Figure 2). Various types of learning materials in any format (group projects, questionnaire, tests, quizzes, presentations, texts, hyperlinks, video, audio, photos, handwritten images, maps, screenshots, notes, etc.) can be arranged in Padlet.

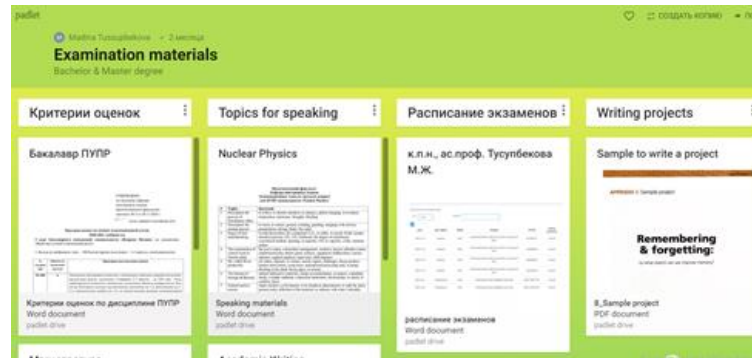


Figure 2 - Visual bookmark collection

Mentimeter involves creating interactive presentations, polls, quizzes, voting, and getting instant feedback. In teaching English, teachers often use this tool to check words and expressions or select associations on a particular lexical topic as an update of the background knowledge at the reflection stage (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 - Associative words for the topic of “W. Shakespeare’s individuality.”

Calameo is a very convenient tool for collaborative work with students in a distance format. Calameo contains all the necessary learning materials, such as teaching materials for the discipline being studied, main and additional sources, students’ works, presentations, essays, reports and creative works. This tool increases reading interest with its colorful and user-friendly interface. It allows students to mark points of interest, turn pages, and zoom in on images and presentations (see Figure 4).



Figure 4 - Educational and didactical (methodological) complex for students of Russian language and literature

The uniqueness of the Edpuzzle tool is ability to create own videos and develop various tasks. This tool allows inserting a video, trim a fragment, record own voice, voice-over, insert audio commentary, develop and add assignments on the material learnt. The instructor can schedule collaborative work with students, set deadlines for assignments, view statistics on assignments and results. The main task of the teacher when working with Edpuzzle is a careful selection of video material in accordance with the thematic focus and the current cultural realities of the country of the target language (see Figure 5).

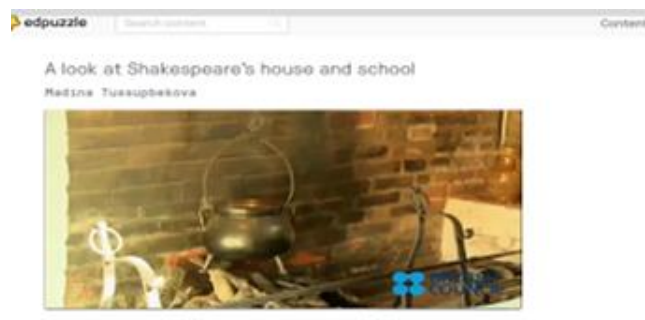


Figure 5 - Tasks development on Edpuzzle

Quizlet is used to revise the lexical material in English teaching, which involves checking all kinds of speech activities (reading, listening, writing and speaking). Students can use this tool independently outside of class time. The teacher develops modules to practice new vocabulary units on the passed material. The modules are cards with words, their translation, definition or picture. Quizlet involves the integrated operation of several modes to practice and consolidate the lexical material (listen, repeat, spell, match the translation or definition) (see Figure 6).

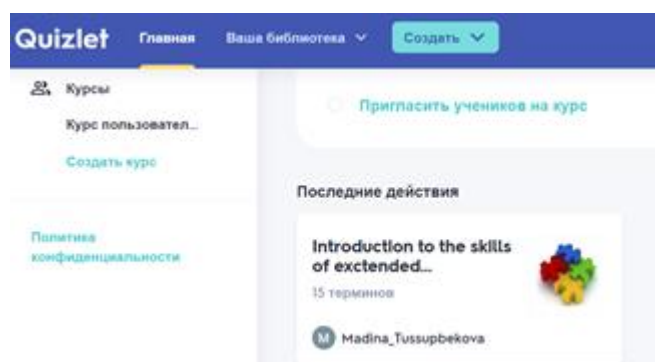


Figure 6 – Lexical units training module

Thus, the use of digital tools in teaching English not only helps in the formation of speaking skills, but also in the development of independent cognitive activity of students. With the use and implementation of digital tools in the educational process, the forms and methods of teaching are considered, a new approach is provided in the learning process associated with critical thinking, analysis, comparison, verbal and semantic forecasting [4].

Conclusion

The tools studied and reviewed in practical English classes (Google Classroom, YouTube, Padlet, Mentimeter, Edpuzzle, Calameo, Quizlet) allow solving complex problems in the learning process. In addition, the use of digital tools in education demonstrates the mobility of the modern education system, its adaptive nature, i.e. timely adaptation to innovative technologies in distance learning.

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