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USAGE OF ICT IN DEVELOPING ADULT'S COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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In the modern age of science and technology, there is a rapid development and transformation in all the sectors that imply the progress and welfare of people, because everything is modernized and digitized. Last but not least, inventions and new technologies could strengthen and influence not only the economy but also the educational system because they have become part of the educational institutions not only for training students but also for training employable people. In this case, information and communication technologies play a vital role in improving students' knowledge by exposing them to recent materials and events. We must note that regardless of the profession a person can exercise or the titles he holds, it is extremely important to be able to express his opinions, ideas and knowledge. Therefore, for success, communicative competence plays a very important role, which is in fact a complex skill, which requires the simultaneous use of a number of different abilities. The use of ICT can contribute to the development of communication skills by improving speech skills, which not only include the accuracy of pronunciation, but also an adequate fluency and effective communication.

Keywords: *ICT, communicative competence, skills, foreign language, teacher, learner, digital applications.*

VALORIFICAREA UTILIZĂRII TIC ÎN FORMAREA COMPETENȚEI DE COMUNICARE ÎN LIMBA STRĂINĂ LA ADULȚI

În epoca modernă a științei și tehnologiei se atestă o dezvoltare și o transformare rapidă în toate sectoarele ce implică progresul și bunăstarea oamenilor, datorită faptului că totul este modernizat și digitalizat. În cele din urmă, invențiile și noile tehnologii ar putea să consolideze și să influențeze nu doar economia, dar și sistemul educațional, deoarece au devenit parte a instituțiilor de învățământ nu doar pentru instruirea studenților, ci și pentru a pregăti persoane angajabile. În acest caz, tehnologiile informaționale și de comunicare joacă un rol vital în ce privește îmbunătățirea cunoștințelor studenților prin expunerea lor la materiale și evenimente recente. Trebuie remarcat faptul că, indiferent de profesia pe care o persoană o poate exercita sau de titlurile pe care le deține, devine extrem de important să poată să-și exprime opiniile, ideile și cunoștințele sale. Prin urmare, pentru a avea succes, competența de comunicare atât în limba maternă, cât și în limba străină, joacă un rol foarte important, fiind, de fapt, o abilitate complexă ce necesită utilizarea simultană a unui număr de diferite abilități. Utilizarea TIC poate contribui la dezvoltarea competenței de comunicare în limba străină prin îmbunătățirea abilităților de vorbire, care includ nu doar acuratețea pronunțării, ci și o fluentă adecvată și o comunicare eficientă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *TIC, competență comunicativă, abilități, limbă străină, profesor, cursant, aplicații digitale.*

Introduction

The popularity of the Internet and computer technologies among young people and society as a whole has created serious reasons for successful integration of ICT into the educational process. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education has, in modern conditions, an increasingly important impact on the quality and competitiveness of the national education system.

Today, we can hardly imagine a language learning lesson without using a particular type of ICT. The use of new technologies allows the introduction of new methods and techniques, which makes training diverse. This also increases the efficiency of classroom work and makes student work more independent. In addition, it is worth mentioning that over the last few decades learning has gradually shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered approach. The development of ICT creates opportunities for both teachers and learners to use such ICT tools as platform learning, multimedia materials, educational software, e-learning, etc. which allows them to combine the principles of blended learning with traditional teaching. Graham (2006) lists six key benefits of using ICT in education: pedagogical wealth, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost efficiency and ease of revision. Thus, online education and "blended learning offer learners and teachers a more effective learning and teaching environment" [1].

There are many types of ICT and sometimes choosing them may seem difficult for teachers and learners. However, we cannot deny that technologies are useful in an educational process, especially in developing

foreign language communication skills, as they are very motivating, always at hand and can provide additional linguistic practice [2].

The importance of using ICT in the process of teaching and developing communicative skills in foreign languages

The integration of ICT in foreign language teaching and learning has been extensively discussed by many researchers, such as Bax (2011), Warschauer and Healey (1998), Walker and White (2013), Stanley (2013). They notice that "the technological developments since the 1980s have directly affected both content and methods and techniques of teaching" [1].

Thus ICT allows the use of combinations of text, graphics, sound, video and animation controlled, coordinated and delivered on the computer screen. Learners are actively involved in presenting information, and are not just passive observers. The possibility to use Internet extends the context of the class and provides access to current authentic materials that bring more variety into the classroom and stimulate interest in the culture of people whose language is studied. As a result both the learner and the teacher benefit from the usage of ICT.

Benefits of using ICT for learners

If in the past, teachers were confronted with the difficulty of setting up an atmosphere and an environment that meets the needs and requirements of students with various learning styles, then, due to technology, the marginalization of students and classroom learning can be avoided. In this respect "multimedia offers multiple ways to meet the needs of learners with different learning styles and strategies" [3].

Simply put, the integration of technology into foreign language classes has triggered learner satisfaction and autonomy. In most language learning contexts, student exposure was limited to classroom; this problem has been successfully solved with ICT because the latter provides us with a wider exposure to the areas of the learned language.

In classroom the students are divided into two categories.

- Techno - pros (techno-professionals – students who have a good mastery of technology and can use it in the learning process);
- Techno - pals (techno-amateurs – students with low and limited skills in using technology as a learning tool).

These two categories cooperate with each other through the exchange of knowledge and experience both in technology and the studied language, which promotes students' interaction and contributes to the development of communicative competence.

According to Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003), we can highlight a number of attributes of ICT that contribute to improving the process of acquiring a foreign language, including the development of communicative skills. Thus, the successful use of information and communication technologies:

✓ *provides interaction, communication activities and real audience*

A good technology generates learners interaction not only among them, but also with the material used for teaching. It also introduces an authentic audience that creates communication and develops the learners' communicative competence.

✓ *provides comprehensive information*

The integration of information and communication technologies extends learners' experience with language, unlike the limited experience offered in traditional classrooms.

✓ *supports the development of cognitive skills*

Using technology, learners develop research skills, critical thinking and research-based skills, being responsible for their own learning, and can also check the validity of the information received in the classroom or outside the class.

✓ *facilitates the development of language skills in foreign languages*

As language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) are the basis for language learning, learners need to have enough room and time for a balanced practice of the four skills in order to form their foreign language competence. The use of ICT as a personalized learning tool allows students to practice and develop language skills.

✓ *meets affective needs of students*

This is the most striking aspect of using ICT in language classes. It is assumed that the computer can never replace the affective support of the teacher for his students. However, self-esteem and learner confidence

increase when they fulfil successfully accurate and attractive tasks using ICT, such as educational platforms, multimedia materials, on-line tests, etc.

Benefits of using ICT for teachers

The integration of ICT in language teaching and learning is beneficial for teachers. Information and communication technologies help teachers to develop their own curriculum; so they can adapt different tasks and instructions to support a positive interaction and increase learner's interest and motivation, which is a real value in the process of developing the communicative competence [4, 5].

Consequently, through the use of ICT teachers gain access to communicative tasks that

- are used in the training area;
- allow speakers autonomy;
- provide feedback from the interlocutor.

In addition, an effective ICT exploitation allows teachers to develop professionally and create a real atmosphere in the classroom, which is a primordial component for the development of communicative competence. ICT support is also an effective tool for the acquisition of language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). The use of ICT in the evaluation process, which is an essential element in language learning and teaching, allows teachers to be aware of the achievements and performance of their students. Some researchers [5, 6-8], consider that traditional assessment is not always objective and correct because it limits student performance, while ICT performance assessment is impartial, instantly and in real-time [9].

Types of ICT used in the process of training and learning

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application such as radio, television, mobile phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and various services and applications associated with them (videoconferencing and distance learning). Information and communication technologies provide access to information through telecommunications.

In the process of teaching foreign languages, ICT is a more general term and involves a variety of approaches. For example, „Computer Assisted Language Learning” (CALL) is any process in which a learner uses a computer and as a result improves his/her language skills, including communicative skills” [2]. It should be mentioned that „Computer Assisted Language Learning” (CALL) is focused on learning, not teaching. The learning process is student-centered and the learning process is completed with such materials as: automatic translations, blogs, instant messaging, podcasts, social networks, wiki, applications, electronic dictionaries, presentation software, quiz-making software, mobile phones, laptops, netbooks, etc.

Language learning is an area which involves more and more various online courses, open access resources, virtual platforms and ICT-based social networking sites, in order to give learners access to information, promote interaction and communication, as well as for the development of communication in a foreign language, which means the ability:

- *to understand;*
- *to produce and decode thoughts, feelings and deeds both orally and in writing at the level of the four integrative skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing.*

Since foreign language teaching and the development of communicative competence has been constantly evolving, it is essential for teachers to be aware of the technologies that have an impact on the teaching and learning process. The development of foreign language communicative skills based on Information and Communication Technologies includes the active participation of students in the learning process, not only in the terms of active consumption of ready-made digital teaching materials but also in creating their own digital content.

Such cooperation between teachers and students in the creation of educational materials ensures the interaction between the following components of the educational environment: effective communication, content and subjects (students). This way the conditions for a fruitful interaction are ensured. All participants involved in the learning process have the same opportunities and rights. The main thing is that Information and Communication Technologies are both a learning tool and a tool for creating social connections in the learning process and contribute to creating a database of digital educational materials and sources. Both students and teachers have become active users of available materials and active creators of new teaching materials. There is also an endless transformation, a change in the educational materials as well as the students' knowledge and skills of the studied foreign language and IT abilities.

Nowadays, there is an abundance of digital resources that can be actively used in training and learning process [10].

Table

Digital applications for adult education:

Digital application	The content	Practice
Moodle Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMS (learning management system) • Access 24h from 24h • 12 types of questions for evaluation • Feedback 	Unlimited access to teaching materials, tests and quizzes; The enhancement of knowledge through self-evaluation and instant feedback; The development of linguistic competence (reading, writing, grammar).
Adobe Connect Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMS (learning management system) • Webinars • Trainings • Tests (9 types of questions) • Collaboration 	Access to authentic materials; Online or off-line lessons; Appropriate communication situations (speeches, simulations, round tables); The development of linguistic competence and speaking competence.
Adobe Presenter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive presentation • Video lessons • Quizzes 	Blended learning; Acquisition of new knowledge; Self-evaluation and instant feedback; The development of linguistic competence and speaking competence.
PowerPoint Prezi Google Slides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic presentations • Special effects • Team work • Easy to use 	The development of perception, imagination, creative thinking and motivation; Acquisition of new knowledge; The development of linguistic competence and strategic competence.
You Tube Google Apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration applications • Placing information • Access from any device connected to Internet 	The development of linguistic competence (listening, understanding and interpretation of oral and written messages, issued by interlocutors or media using communicative skills acquired previously); Enrichment of cultural knowledge; The development of speaking competence and cultural competence.
Kahoot Quizizz Learning Apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Evaluation • Poll • Feedback 	The enhancement of linguistic competence (listening, reading, speaking and writing).
Padlet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Access to multimedia, documents, web links, etc. • Exchange of experience • Creating a digital portfolio 	Free collaborative resource; Interaction teacher-student or student-student; Self-contained and personal usage of message-making techniques and procedures, coherence and discursive cohesion, according to the communication situations; The development of sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.

It should be noted that the communicative competence in a foreign language has a much wider sphere than linguistic competence. According to M.Swain and M.Canale we can identify at least five dimensions of communicative competence, namely:

linguistic competence, i.e. the speaker's ability to use the language correctly;

- 1) *sociolinguistic competence*, i.e. the speaker's ability to use the language properly according to the social environment;
- 2) *speaking competence*, i.e. the speaker's ability to recognize and use the language properly on the type of speech;

- 3) *strategic competence*, i.e. the speaker's ability to use language functionally and strategically (effective discourse, tact and politeness);
- 4) *cultural competence*, i.e. knowledge of the elements of culture and civilization of the foreign linguistic environment [6].

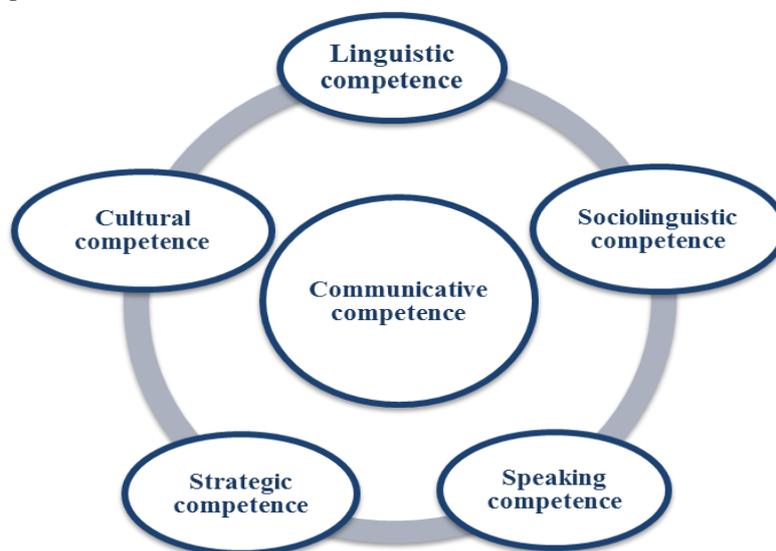


Fig.1. The dimensions of communicative competence.

In this context ICT contributes to the development of the speaker's ability to use the language

- ✓ *correct* in terms of vocabulary and grammar;
- ✓ *adequate*, i.e. adapted to the social context and the type of speech;
- ✓ *functionally and strategic*, i.e. usage of tactical and polite language, in order to achieve real goals;
- ✓ *culturally competent* [11].

Advantages and disadvantages of using ICT

ICT integration in the teaching - learning process allows teachers of foreign languages to apply the advantages of these technologies in order to improve their pedagogical practices. Today, in the information age, technology becomes an integral part of the daily practice and can meet the requirements of a wide range of learners. Based on the literature review [3,4,8,10,12] we can highlight some of the main advantages of ICT usage in the classroom:

- active involvement of learners;
- novelty and creativity;
- improvement of academic skills;
- a paradigm shift in teaching and learning;
- an assessment shift;
- improvement of collaborative learning process.

With the help of ICT, teachers and students can create their own interactive materials that respond to their own needs and interests and can have permanent access to them. This fact provides more flexibility for learning.

Learning through social interaction facilitates a platform for discussion and brainstorming, collaborative writing, sharing reading, peer-to-peer teaching and problem solving. Additionally, technologies can offer ways to present, engage, express, and assess students' understanding and acquisition of language as well as literacy skills necessary for the development of communicative competence. The use of ICT in the class of foreign languages has other benefits too, e.g.: the fun factor, the variety of available resources, a large volume of language data, acquisition of new vocabulary and development of technological skills [13].

However, the integration of ICT into the language classroom cannot be devoid of problems. Thus, before implementing ICT in the daily teaching practice, it is important to take into account the disadvantages they may have. There are some concerns about integrating ICT into the language classroom. The most common of them are:

- lack of access to ICT;
- lack of time for training;
- lack of effective training;
- teacher's attitude;
- student's attitude.

On the one hand, the lack of computers and software may limit the teacher's activity in the classroom with regard ICT use, but on the other hand, teachers need more ICT training and should be trained more effectively, as most students are skilled in ICT use.

Conclusions

The use of information and communication technologies in the process of adults training and the development of communicative competence in a foreign language should be highly encouraged, because these innovative tools are an effective support in the teaching process and can be used both in on-line and face-to-face learning. This tendency is becoming more present in the modern world of technologies and establishes itself as a viable tool for improving the foreign language teaching. All at once we must be aware that ICT usage will not automatically make the teaching – learning process more efficient. Apart from opportunities, the rapid development of ICT could present a number of challenges. Therefore, it is important to use ICT in a pedagogical approach that meets the requirements and needs of the adults that study a foreign language.

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