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TÍTULO: El papel de las tabletas PC en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL).

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RESUMEN: Este documento analiza las formas de utilizar dispositivos móviles para mejorar el proceso de estudio de idiomas extranjeros. Las nuevas tecnologías están cambiando todo el tiempo y se han vuelto más accesibles para los estudiantes y los maestros. Las Tablet PC (computadoras personales) se han convertido recientemente en dispositivos muy atractivos porque se encuentran a medio camino entre los teléfonos móviles y las computadoras portátiles. El artículo aborda el problema de la integración de tabletas en el currículo. La implementación de tabletas promueve el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras pero los cambios metodológicos deben dirigirse y permitir la elección y la independencia. El documento también describe principios claves de trabajar con tabletas dentro y fuera del aula, teniendo en cuenta sus funciones modernas.

PALABRAS CLAVES: tecnología, tablet PC, lengua extranjera, enseñanza, estudiante.

TITLE: The role of PC tablets in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

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ABSTRACT: This paper looks at the ways to use mobile devices to enhance the process of studying foreign languages. New technologies are changing all the time and have become more accessible for students and teachers. Tablet PCs (personal computers) have recently become very attractive devices because they are halfway between mobile phones and laptops. The article addresses the problem of integration of tablets into the curriculum. The implementation of tablets promotes foreign language learning. However, the methodological changes need to be directed as well as allowing choice and independence. The paper also outlines the key principles of working with tablets in and outside classroom taking into account all their modern functions.

KEY WORDS: technology, tablet PC, foreign language, teaching, learner.

INTRODUCTION.

Twenty first century learning and teaching differ greatly from what have been used to. It includes the use of technology and new devices that can be applied in innovative ways to engage with learning (Galatis H., White G., 2013).

Modern learners belong to generation Z and need knowledge and skills to live and study successfully in a technology driven world. It is not just learning how to use a gadget, but they need to develop skills to adopt to the changing environment.

New mobile technologies and a wide use of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) in education have had a significant impact on development of foreign language teaching and learning. The Information Age has built a new type of teacher-student relationship in which both parts are equally treated.

In spite of the fact that distance learning has been a vital part of education for a long period of time, the essence of technology-based learning has recently undergone a significant change. Worldwide economies contribute to social changes through the use of new technologies in all spheres of life. Undoubtedly, there has been a great shift towards the purchase of such individual devices as tablets

in the last five years. It means students can attend classes with their own devices, which are big enough to study for a certain period of time, unlike pocket-sized gadgets. BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) means allowing students to use different devices and gadgets they bring with them during classes.

The greatest problem with BYOD approach is equity, because not all students can have access to technologies. Moreover, there can be some differences in the quality of the mobile devices students possess and the options they offer. Whereas some students can own PC tablets with high resolution screens, others can have a device with limited functions.

The paper focuses on the methodological issues that are conducive to teaching and learning through the use of mobile devices and in particular PC tablets. Smart mobile devices and tablets are the newest addition to the long list of technological innovations believed to enhance and support the learning and teaching processes (Tamin R. et al., 2015).

Mobile devices are widely used outside classroom to read, write, take pictures, watch videos and communicate with others. New technologies that have always been attractive for young people can be used for educational purposes. Like any other mobile devices, tablet PCs provide learning on the go and free of time or space (Savas P., 2014). With BYOD learners' devices may be connected to the Internet via network. However, mobile data packages on the tablets are usually expensive and a university can't expect all learners to use their own devices without providing free Wi-Fi access.

PC tablets have recently become a preferable tool for many educational organizations eager to provide innovative learning opportunities. Tablets are quickly appearing as a powerful eLearning tool in higher education (Cicchino R., Mirliss D., 2004). Early adopters in higher education have developed tablet PC teaching platforms that promote active learning methods and support in-class student-student and teacher-students collaboration (Prey J., Weaver A., 2007). Nevertheless, the tablets are unlikely to be the only technology that learners can use, so it is vital that they get access to the virtual learning environment. Modern teachers consider a tablet to be an efficient device to

teach foreign languages, complementing traditional forms of instruction with LMS (learning management system) like Moodle or Blackboard. Universities tend to use different clouds for ease of sharing. Up-to-date apps and sites such as Google Cloud allow students and teachers to share files by uploading them to the same folders.

DEVELOPMENT.

Tablet PCs – challenges and innovations.

Like all learning resources, one of the main decisions about tablets is to take into account how and when English language teachers expect them to be used.

Some teachers are technology reluctant and never use available resources during classes. The teachers should feel comfortable with tablets if they want to implement them successfully. Sometimes teachers avoid using technology in class because they may be afraid of going wrong. Teachers can share with their colleagues the challenges they face while using tablets and find possible solutions to solve them. There is also a great fear among teachers that learners will be engaged in other activities during the classes and not be focused on the main task. So, teachers have to decide if it is possible for students to use social media. They will find it hard to ban the use of social media and after that encourage the learners to collaborate during and after the classes.

Tablets make teaching more dynamic and available to learners through the use of up-to-date digital materials (Santamarta J. C., Hernández-Gutierrez L. E., 2015). There is no definite part of a lesson in which students should work with tablet. The time period can vary from teacher to teacher and from learner to learner. Nevertheless, teachers have to ensure they are ready for learners to get access to digital materials developed for the tablets. It does not necessarily mean the electronic version of the coursebook. This means teachers have to plan carefully the activities that learners engage with. It will also influence the types of tasks the learners will take part in outside the class.

The emergence of tablet PC technologies has heralded the increasing use of new ICT for conventional classroom environments (Xiang W. et al., 2009). In practice, the technologies are changing so quickly that all universities are still experimenting, that is why how the tablets are used depends on the confidence of the instructors as well as the individual context. Tablets and their functions are regularly evolving, that is why CPD (Continuous Professional Development) allows to keep teachers and instructors informed. There are hundreds of applications available and locating the best ones to use can be challenging for the teachers. That is why it is a good idea to start by introducing not more than several apps at a time.

There are a lot of apps that have similar functions, so the teachers should choose an app that offers the most efficient coverage for the university. For instance, screen recording is a widespread tool in language classrooms. It lets teachers make short videos of presentations in English, and learners can also prepare their presentations. Students can practice their language skills by suggesting an app of the month or writing a review of a new app. Thus, students can take responsibility for finding and using new apps. Language teachers have to find ways to ensure that learners can share their knowledge and experience. The use of tablets in class cannot be prescribed by the teachers. Tablets by their nature result into creativity and teachers have to take it into account and loosen a bit classroom control.

Integration of technologies into the language curriculum.

One of the key problems faced by e-learning is the lack of substantial theoretical basis which allows to assess the quality of language programmes that mostly rely on mobile technologies. Efficient language learning with tablets should be smoothly integrated into the curriculum. The use of modern technologies helps the English teacher to become not only an instructor but also a facilitator and a motivator, thus allowing the students to work on their own, work with extra resources and apply knowledge both in and outside the classroom. Efficient implementation of tablet also

incorporates fast collaboration, quick response and constructive feedback. Learners note that feedback provided with the tablet contains clear information as well as ‘human touch’ for online tasks (Steinweg S. B., 2006).

The use of tablets can be a case when the teacher understands the importance of student autonomy in learning. It demands curriculum change, but students may wish to explore the potential of tablets without getting instructions from teachers. Instead of strict control and planning, teachers require support and help to integrate tablets into universities, offering learners templates and frameworks for their activities.

Like all technologies, it is not the gadget itself, but the way it is applied becomes important. One of the key advantages of using tablets is the chance to bring together different areas of language learning. English as a foreign language can be a good starting point because as well as the setup tools on the tablets, there are special language applications for teachers and learners to explore. Moreover, teachers can promote collaboration and communication with students to boost opportunities for studying languages.

The introduction of technologies into the language curriculum is likely to have an influence on classroom management and organization. In practice, teachers may need to rearrange the desks and chairs in the classroom to allow learners to study together using tablets. From the very beginning the teacher should set a routine with students. If students didn't have access to technologies, instructors would probably consider the classroom organization in a similar way, but the use of tablets is a perfect chance to try what works best.

As soon as students learn to work fast on the tablets, class time can be arranged in a different way. It will be easier for teachers to implement project-based learning because students will get better access to activities and get used to work on their own without teacher's instructions. A recent research at the Open University in Yorkshire indicates that tablet PC technology can help ‘blend’ face to face and online teaching activities (Lavery H., 2012).

Meeting the individual needs of students has long been the main principle of education. When dealing with a mixed-ability English class it is usually difficult to implement, as the teacher has to balance the requirements of many, and it often occurs that a task is paced too fast for some learners and too slowly for others. The introduction of devices into language teaching can be a good way to provide more differentiated and personalized learning process.

It should be noted that mobile learning provides extensive opportunities to students with disabilities enrolled in inclusive education. PC tablets offer individual-oriented and flexible learning to meet the personal needs of students with SENs (special educational needs); for instance, audio voice messaging can be a useful function for hearing-impaired learners, and programs that allow to enlarge font size on screens or read texts aloud are very helpful to students with vision impairments. Tablets for classroom use are filled with different educational materials such as videos and apps, textbooks, thus providing learners with a range of resources.

The teacher can easily assign various types of tasks to groups of students, and learners can practice different activities. The learners with a good language comprehension can work on a more advanced task, while a learner who is experiencing certain difficulties and needs teacher's help can be given another exercise. Rather than just observing the students, the teacher should walk around, answer students' questions and provide assistance if necessary.

During the class the teacher is likely to play the role of facilitator. For example, when the learners are engaged in collaborative work on a tablet or a project, the teacher should take a less hands-on approach to teaching. At this stage the teacher usually guides and gives advice to students so that they can achieve better learning results. The instructor might also deal with language aspects emerging from the activities rather than presenting new vocabulary or grammar. At first it can be challenging because the teacher feels less control of the class, but students are more likely to memorize these language aspects as they need them for their tasks.

The creation of various exercises for a reading text is a good example of using tablets for individual work. With the personal devices the process is easily managed. It is also less evident to the groupmates that they are doing different activities. Instead of creating handouts, the teacher can upload the files either to the Cloud for the learners or preload the exercise on the devices prior to the class. With the development of new applications, teachers can work out educational plans that can be assigned to learners to study at their own pace. New Cloud applications allow teacher to assign the language tasks that can be easily accessed by learners.

Although a lot of apps are user-friendly, teachers cannot always guess that learners are making best use of all functions. Sharing tools and practical ideas can be incorporated in regular class time. It can be organized by the teacher or one of the students. It is a good idea for students to use particular applications recommended by the teacher. The teacher can prepare a basic list of resources for learners to use. It will let the teacher know that all students have the necessary information and they don't have to make a random search. So, learners should be motivated to compile their own bank of materials that they can use for particular topics and subjects, because it will allow them to organize the resources when they need to refer to them again. As the learners become more confident, they don't need to be advised on what language apps to use.

Generally speaking, the applications used for language learning promote creation and automation. Nevertheless, English teachers shouldn't overuse automated activities. Automated applications usually require the learners to identify something in the picture or to type a missing word in a gap. Although automated tasks can be an efficient way to check learners' comprehension, the students may consider it to be a bad way to use a tablet. It is due to the fact that automated applications usually provide feedback by showing that something is correct or incorrect, with little or no explanation at all when the learners give an incorrect answer. That is why it is important for the teacher to monitor what is going on.

On the contrary, creative applications foster communication and collaboration. Basically, these can be apps that help learners researching a topic for a presentation, or a word processing application that allows to create a piece of writing in groups. The English teacher should keep in mind that any app should be used for the aim of the language learning, not just because of what it does.

There are several advantages of using tablets because students can get personal control over the access to materials to support their language learning. Students have an opportunity to search for pronunciation, vocabulary and translation, as well as videos and images of language examples being used. The language teacher should keep in mind that basically tablets are one of the tools to help language learning. When a university invests heavily into technology, there can be a trend to use it all the time. However, it should be applied for clear target and there is a clear learning result. The risk is that the English lesson is led by the technology rather than the aim of learning the language. That is why it is vital to ensure that the learners understand what they are studying, and that is not just a 'technology' class.

Having identified that the learning results are primary, the instructor should finally decide if the tablets are the best tools for the task accomplishment. The language teacher can use SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) model in order to identify if a tablet can provide the best learning result.

The model developed by R. Puentedura (2006) helps to assess how technology influences learning and teaching. Substitution means that technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with no functional change. Augmentation implies that technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with functional improvement. Modification means that technology allows for significant task redesign. Finally, redefinition implies that technology allows for the creation of new tasks, previously inconceivable. According to this model, the use of electronic dictionary can be an example of substitution (replacing traditional paper dictionary). The key advantage that e-dictionary has over a traditional paper variant is the opportunity for the learners to hear the pronunciation of words. In case the

learning goal is to pre-teach vocabulary for a listening task then using this function allows to achieve that goal. Thus, the tablet provides augmentation.

The invention of electronic coursebooks has given the language teachers good opportunities for modification; for instance, a conventional model of listening in class is usually controlled by the teacher. Learners in a group listen to the recording once or twice and then check the answers. Using the tablet for playing the audio transforms this type of activity if the learning objective is to improve learners' listening skills.

Every student can use earphones to listen to the audio file on their tablet and do it as many times as necessary. This use of technology enhances differentiated approach to language learning, helping all students achieve learning objectives. It should be noted that although there are no established parameters to define all four aspects of the SAMR model, the categories give good recommendations for the language teachers to identify how technology can help reach the learning objective.

With BYOD policy, the teachers may assign learners individual work, particularly in terms of promoting differentiation. Students, however, attend lessons to practice English and the intensive use of personal tablets can result in learners keeping silence instead of spoken practice and communication. While there is nothing bad with individual learners searching for pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar, an exercise that requires learners to cooperate is more likely to promote more authentic language practice. Collaborative work requires building a rapport and trust among students because it usually focuses on exploring and creating something new and unpredictable.

The English teacher should motivate learners to collaborate. It will involve the students working with the tablets in small groups or pairs. It is not surprising that the increase in devices in education has led to a boost in project-based learning. The tablets give perfect opportunities for small- and large-scale language projects. University students can work together on projects across the world, being involved in collecting and processing information.

Modern tablets – options and learning functions.

PC tablets turn out to be effective educational tools due to the user-friendly interface, ease of access and built-in communication instruments. Connectivity and portability of mobile devices give learners a chance to perform a wide range of tasks such as searching, analyzing and storing relevant information; for instance, PDF apps for Android allow students to highlight paragraphs in the document and send them via email to themselves for the further use.

Modern tablets have a lot of useful options, for example, inbuilt cameras. The cameras can be used in different ways, from giving learners the task to create visual dictionaries to asking them to prepare presentations.

The groups of students can be given different words from the textbook and use their tablets to take necessary photos to create a pictorial representation of vocabulary. Taking the correct picture means that learners understand the meaning correctly. Moreover, a wiki or blog can be used for the learners to turn the photos into a visual dictionary. Alternatively, learners can take pictures relating to a particular project and use special apps to compile images into a presentation. The learners are cooperating to choose the pictures they need and what they are going to present. Finally, the students collaborate to prepare the presentation. It should be noted that tablets are secondary to the language in each stage of work. Such kind of work promotes motivation and helps with mixed ability classes, because any video project requires learners with creative abilities as well as language skills.

Modern tablets have also inbuilt audio recorders that allow learners to make short speech recordings that let them check pronunciation and track progress. Thus, the device turns the learners into the role of 'instructor'. When doing a speaking task, the group of learners can use a tablet to record the activity in the background. After the task has been finished the students can listen to the recording, check and correct themselves.

Learner can record a coursebook role-play and listen to it to check on the pronunciation. The students can be asked to prepare and record their own dialogue. Students can also record short descriptions of words without saying them. In such audio gap fills, learner records a contextualizing sentence for a word or word partnership, leaving a 'gap' for other learners. Such tasks can be united into a podcast so that learners have a chance to revise the task after the lesson.

Podcasts are also a perfect way of using a tablet's recording function. Thus, learners can create short radio programmes and film reviews in English. Such activities help learners and teachers to think more precisely about how they are applying the tablets. They allow students to take more responsibility for their learning.

Tablets also help teachers to get feedback from students in form of voting and encourage all learners, even less confident, to participate. Voting lets teachers check how well students understand key points and who is actively involved in learning. Getting all the learners involved promotes cooperation between the students. Teachers also need to take into account the final result of the task. They should provide feedback on the completion of the activity. Teachers may record students' answers orally or make a list of common points.

CONCLUSIONS.

To sum up, one of the important advantages of using tablets is being able to deal with language learners on a differentiated and personal level rather than as an average group of students. Moreover, by using the tablets for various creative projects students have an opportunity to apply language in meaningful context both in and outside the classroom.

Taking the tablets home motivates studying outside the classroom and helps integrate the foreign language into the real life of the learners.

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