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Digital Technologies of Learning Foreign Languages in Postgraduate Education

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Abstract

In the European Union, by 2025, it is planned to create a single European educational space. It means that knowledge of English is of vital importance for representatives of all professions and for teachers in particular. According to the research, teachers' English language proficiency is on a rather low level. Digital technologies can help to improve the situation. Today, there are many opportunities on the Internet to learn a foreign language using Youtube, blogs, podcasts, where many content has already been generated. The Blended Learning Concept of Foreign Languages is being developed using the online platform “Lingva Skills” for language training specialists at universities.

Thanks to digital technologies, knowledge and content become public, helping to align hierarchies previously based on knowledge and focus instead on skills and intelligence.

For deep and comprehensive learning, it is worth using digital technologies that promote more intensive and better assimilation of foreign languages.

Keywords: digital technologies, language proficiency, innovation, communication, blended learning, the Internet, postgraduate education

In Global Competitiveness Index Ratings: Higher Education (GCI – WEF), in 2017 Ukraine decreased by 2 positions in comparison with the last year and now occupies 35th place out of 137. To make country's progress in the rating-sinaccordance to actual human capital assets indicators, education and training should be reformed fundamentally by rethinking quantitative priorities to qualitative and developing a system of continuous adult education.

The English Proficiency Index plays a significant role in the overall rating list. Ubiquity of English does not show anycountry's cultural superiority, but reflects the need for a common languagein the modern, interconnected world. More than one million adults from 80 countries took part in the research in 2017.

The main results of this year include the following:

- fewer countries improved in command of English (only four countries showed significant growth: Panama, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Thailand). However, in most countries, English proficiency remains the same, and although no country has shown a significant drop as a result, due to adding new countries and high density in the ranking, some countries dropped more than 10 positions);
- Europeans know English best, but not by much;
- adults in Latin America are catching up with adults in Asia;
- English language proficiency in Africa is still difficult to assess;
- Middle East has the lowest level of English proficiency;
- women speak English better than men;
- young people speak English better than elderly generation;
- English is associated with main economic and social indicators.

In “EP EPI Index” report, all countries are divided into five categories, depending on the level of English proficiency: from very high to very low. This division simplifies search for countries with a similar level of language proficiency and allows comparisons within and between regions.

Tasks for each level demonstrate the skills a participant must possess to enter one or another rating category. In “Index EF EPI”, only countries and territories where English is not native are considered. It is important to remember that the country's entry into one or another category of rating points to preliminary language competence among the tested citizens.

Here is a correlation between the requirements for the English language skills and levels of English language proficiency in Table 1.

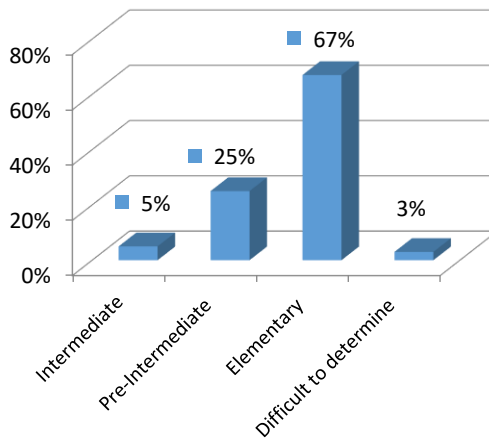
Table 1. Levels of language proficiency EF EPI

| Levels of English proficiency | Requirements for English language proficiency | Countries that occupy the first three places at each of the levels |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Advanced | Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express himself fluently. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. | The Netherlands Sweden Denmark |
| Upper-Intermediate | Can understand the main ideas of text on both concrete and abstract topics. Can interact with the degree of fluency. Can produce clear text on a wide range of subjects. | Germany Poland Australia |
| Intermediate | Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, learning, entertainment. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar. | Bulgaria Greece Lithuania |
| Elementary | Can understand sentences and expressions related to area of most immediate relevance. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks. | China Japan Russia |
| Beginner | Can understand and use every day familiar expressions and very basic phrases aimed at satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce themselves and others. | Syria Qatar Morocco |

In 2017 according to the English knowledge index, Ukraine has dropped to 6 positions and is currently taking the 47th position out of 80 countries, which corresponds to a low level of language proficiency.

We also tested teachers of Nizhyn Agrotechnical College on the level of English proficiency. The test consisted of reading, listening and writing tasks. The results can be seen in Table 2.

Figure 1. Results of testing of teachers of the Nizhyn Agrotechnical College



In the context of our research, we will dwell on learning English by adults, that is, postgraduate education (specialized improvement of person’s education and professional training by deepening, enlarging and updating his professional knowledge, abilities and skills, or getting another specialty on the basis of the previously acquired educational qualification level and practical experience).

Extremely few countries have national projects aimed directly at improving working adults’ English language skills. In Singapore and Hong Kong, there are ongoing campaigns that encourage adults to improve their English. Companies and individuals invest in their own English language education, and funding schemes for continuing education often include a possibility of learning foreign languages. But these projects are rarely coordinated at the national level.

In the European Union, by 2025, it is planned to create a single European educational space. The European Commission put forward the initiative. “The European Commission outlined a vision for creating European educational space by 2025. It is convinced that consolidating the potential in education and culture that promotes creation jobs, economic growth and consolidation of social justice is in member states’ interests of”, said the EU’s governing body.

Within the framework of common European educational space, it is planned to introduce a single student card; to ensure mutual recognition of diplomas within the framework of the new “Sorbonne Process”; to strengthen cooperation on improvement of higher educational system; to develop knowledge of foreign languages (at least two in addition to their native language); to encourage learning process throughout the lives; to introduce innovation and digital technologies in the educational process wider; to create a network of European universities; to guarantee teachers social protection; to attract investment in the educational sector and protect the cultural heritage of European identity.

The urgency of this issue for Ukraine is that for its systematic and deep integration into the European and world community knowledge of English at a sufficiently high level is required. Learning it by representatives of social categories will also significantly increase their competitiveness in the labor market.

In order to ensure a free access of all those wishing to study foreign languages, the social project “Academy of Skills” (www.skillsacademy.com.ua) was launched. It is a leading team specializing in creation of innovative educational tools solving acute social issues. In cooperation with the Association of Innovation and Digital Education, they created and launched a free online technology for learning English with these targeted audiences, called Lingva Skills (www.lingva.ua), designed to study English to B1-B1+ levels. The purpose of this project is to provide the state with efficient solutions in the cheapest way, to improve knowledge and skills of using English among Ukrainians:

- -reach level B2;
- -ability to independently read the original (or English translation) of international legislative documents and other information that promotes personal development and increases work efficiency;
- -increasing competitiveness in the labor market;
- -ability to communicate in English in (e-mailing, social networking, etc.) with foreign representatives; it promotes person’s self-development and broaden the outlook;
- preparation for successful English proficiency testing in accordance with international standards;
- -full and deep integration of Ukraine as a whole and the CA in particular into the international community, which is impossible without knowledge of a generally accepted international language, which is English.

It was determined what problems should be solved, what skills should be formed to master English, and subsequently other languages of the EU countries, according to international standards through online education.

The concepts of online and offline education are often found in pedagogical editions. Oxford dictionary defines “online” as “managed or connected to a computer” or as “an activity”, “a service”, which is available exclusively via

the Internet. In terms of the Internet online indicates tconnection state, while offline - off position. Offline projects involve the use of paper media, they cannot employ a lot of participants who live in the regions or are busy at work, so they cannot attend classes.

Therefore, the online technology of learning English has the following benefits: available for study anywhere and anytime; unlimited number of users; free of charge; effective; interesting (there are elements of gamification - use of gaming practices and mechanisms in a non-gaming context to attract end-users to solve problems).

Today, there are many opportunities on the Internet to learn a foreign language using Youtube, blogs, podcasts, where many content has already been generated. A person can choose the content that will be of interest to him. Therefore, the specialists of the Association of Innovation and Digital Education have decided to make the most missing component.

Firstly, educational materials that contribute to the development of a person's ability to perceive, disassemble and understand what he has heard right now are developed. This is the first step in the online system - after listening to the audio, it is necessary to make a phrase from the suggested words. This exercise also develops phonemic memory through certain authoring techniques.

Secondly, use of structures to express opinions is actively trained. So it is impossible to make a word for word translation: "cat – animal". In Ukrainian it consists of two words, in English – five (A cat is an animal). And we must take it into account.

Thirdly, an internal reference is formed. In order to correctly write in English or correct something written in a task, a person must internally imagine a correct word or sentence in English. And when this inner imagination works, – what exactly is not written correctly, each participant can either look at the prompt or look for the right answer in his memory. And then he becomes sure that the material is properly mastered and can be used fluently.

Online technology Lingva Skills also suggests testing and repetition. That is, psychologically the system is organized so that a person, if he is serious about learning language, could not but learn. This system cannot but work.

Along with teaching foreign languages, the Association for Innovative and Digital Education implements: a platform for online learning and employment according to modern employers' requirements, training teacherdigital literacy and e-democracy, an all-Ukrainian educational anti-corruption project, etc. As for Lingva.Skills directly, 2.5 million requests from Ukrainians were received in a year and a half: employees of almost all ministries, committees of the Verkhovna Rada, a lot of regional authorities and local self-governments have already joined the training. New and new applications are received not only from public employees, but also from educational and hospital institutions, internally

displaced persons, associations of disabled people, ATO participants, public organizations, business associations and entrepreneurs. Specialists are trying to provide the best possible training to those who wish. But since this is just a volunteer project, the Association has limited financial capabilities. However, at the end of 2017, more than 100,000 people were registered on the site that performed more than 30 million exercises. On average, three or four thousand users work on the site daily.

The Blended Learning Concept of Foreign Languages is being developed using the online platform “Lingva Skills” for language training specialists at universities. Mechanism of realization mixed learning concept involves creation of a comfortable educational informational environment, a system of communications, representing all necessary educational information. In this context, information environment of a modern university is a combination of traditional and innovative (electronic) forms of learning with the constant improvement of information and communication technologies (ICT) and electronic resources, as well as continuous improvement of teaching methods, teachers’ professional knowledge.

It is well-known that digital revolution is a phenomenon that gives unprecedented productivity improvement, speeds information distribution and makes our lives more qualitative. However, besides opportunities there are risks. This is especially true for employees of large and medium-sized companies in particular and the labor force in the labor market in general. Their skills quickly become inveterate, since artificial intelligence and automation are undertaking more and more work tasks.

With regard to the use of digital technologies in education, thanks to them, teachers and professors have an opportunity not to repeat the same thing over and over again – and move on to develop the skills needed to succeed in the modern changing world. Today, Wikipedia, Khan Academy and lots of other open online courses developed by schools and universities form the general level of knowledge. Thanks to them, knowledge and content become public, helping to align hierarchies previously based on knowledge and now focus on skills and intelligence.

Currently, foreign and some domestic universities open educational courses online, and modern technologies in the form of cloud storage have provided everyone with the most accessible knowledge. Recently, Top Universities opened free use to another 130 free of charge online courses in various fields of science.

The publication “VSVITI” has prepared a selection of various online resources for self-education: “Prometheus” (online courses from teachers of leading Ukrainian higher education institutions: business English, preparation for independent external testing, financial management, history, culturology, philos-

ophy, programming basics and others); *Languages* (you can study 50 different languages! And they also are taught in 25 languages); “WebPromExpress” (video lectures for workers of informational sphere, and courses on journalism, advertising, PR, etc. for upgrade training); Coursera (the website contains courses for many specialties in different languages which are taught by leading American universities. If you complete the final test successfully, you can get an approved certificate).

The increase in the speed of innovation is determined by powerful communication infrastructure, which propagates new ideas with the speed of light. Machines are constantly becoming more powerful. This means that we must constantly learn, develop and adapt. Those who do not catch with this process risk to be without work in the future - even taking into account the fact that routine tasks will be done by automated systems.

Modernity proves that a lot of innovations are created in companies where creative and proactive people work. Then knowledge spreads through the ecosystem, as specialists move from one company to another. The current educational offer is lagging far behind and is not well suited to overcoming the gap between companies’ needs of and professional skills. An important role is played by the continuity of learning throughout life.

Conclusions

Actuality of Ukrainian citizens’ English language proficiency is that for its systematic and deep integration into the European and world community, knowledge of English at a sufficiently high level is required.

Use of digital technologies in education, in particular when learning foreign languages, is becoming increasingly active every year. Online and blended learning contributes to broader engagement of all those wishing to learn foreign languages, which increases their competitiveness on the world labor market.

Opening of educational courses abroad by some foreign and domestic universities allows free access to modern technologies in the form of cloud storage for getting and accumulation of new knowledge, which is extremely important for adult population. Therefore, in postgraduate education, special attention should be paid to learning English. For deep and comprehensive learning, it is worth using digital and innovative technologies that promote more intensive and better mastering of foreign languages.

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