UDC 378.147.34

DOI: 10.52534/msu-pp.7(4).2021.50-57

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Modern Tools for Creative Learning of English in a Blended Learning Environment: Practices of Ukrainian Universities

Article's History:

Received: 13.09.2021

Revised: 14.10.2021

Accepted: 15.11.2021

Suggested Citation:

Ponomarenko, O.V., Kostyk, Ye.V., & Petrova, T.M. (2021). Modern tools for creative learning of English in a blended learning environment: Practices of Ukrainian universities. *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series "Pedagogy and Psychology"*, 7(4), 50-57.

Abstract. The practice of teaching English in higher education institutions confirms the efficiency and the popularity of using the blended learning methodology. The purpose of this study is to identify the tools of creative learning of English in a blended learning environment and establish their impact on the level of English language proficiency. To cover the purpose of this study, the authors employed theoretical and empirical methods, namely abstraction, theoretical analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, observation, questionnaire survey, description, comparison, and generalisation. It is established that blended learning, as a new method of learning English, involves the use of modern interactive and innovative technologies in the educational process, so that the conventional educational process transforms into a creative process with an innovative approach to obtaining professional competencies by students. It is determined that the use of information and communication technologies in a blended learning environment opens up opportunities for students to independently investigate educational material, but this process should take place under the guidance of a teacher. It is proved that online platforms are equally important for creative learning of English, the advantages of which are mobility, systematicity, interactivity, and controllability of knowledge. It is established that teachers of the Departments of English and foreign languages of the Olesya Gonchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, and Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University offer students to use such online platforms as Quizlet, Freerice, Learn English from the British Council Vocabulary.com, Microsoft Teams and the Flipgrid application for creative learning of English the effectiveness of which has been confirmed by a survey of students. The practical significance of the results obtained in this study indicates that the approach, according to which it is planned to survey students using a questionnaire method to identify the influence of information and communication technologies and creative learning tools on the academic achievements of students in learning English in Ukrainian higher education institutions, is of universal importance

Keywords: blended learning methodology, innovative and interactive tools, online platform, educational process

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INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is an educational process strategy that combines conventional and distance learning. The trend towards the introduction of blended learning in higher education institutions is growing every year. This is associated with the perception of blended learning as a promising area of education, covering a variety of teaching methods, for example, teaching methodology, educational technologies, online teaching and teaching with the introduction of tools for creative study of educational material in this process. At the same time, blended learning is one of the ways to teach and learn English in foreign and Ukrainian institutions of higher education. Studies have indicated that the use of blended learning instead of conventional teaching methods or only approaches to online teaching has many advantages not only for teaching students, but also for the learning environment, namely for teachers of institutions of higher education [1]. Some of these benefits include improving the English learning process and developing language skills, which is conditioned upon the impact of blended learning on each of the integrated English language skills, namely writing, speaking, and listening [1].

Blended learning is a set of pedagogical strategies and practices that are closely related to the emergence of new technology in society and in institutions of higher education. This teaching methodology is used in all academic and professional fields and, accordingly, has a positive impact on the motivation and efficiency of students' learning [2], and in particular when students are learning English. Notably, blended learning allows not only improving the proficiency in a foreign language (for example, English), but also contributing to easier integration of foreign students into the educational process of institutions of higher education [3].

Teaching English in higher education institutions demonstrates a high level of effectiveness of the acquired knowledge by students, in particular, provided that the method of blended learning is used in the educational process, which allows combining both internet opportunities and classical (conventional) approaches to the implementation of the educational process towards better assimilation of educational material by students. Under the influence of academic, technological, and innovative development, higher education institutions are increasingly using this methodology in the educational process, and especially now – during the period of pandemic restrictions. Thanks to special interactive tools, blended learning, on the one hand, allows for live communication, and on the other hand – creates opportunities for students to learn the language better, without requiring the student to be present in the classroom, because learning can take place online, that is, students can read books, watch videos, learn new words visually.

Thanks to the use of innovative technologies, teachers of institutions of higher education feel more confident in their ability to teach English, so they are increasingly moving from didactic to more interactive forms of presenting educational

material to students [4]. To improve the efficiency of using information and communication technologies (ICT) in students' learning of English, it is advisable to increase the level of digital competence of teachers to improve the educational process in the future [5]. Information and communication, and creative technologies open up new methods of learning English for students. Efficient introduction and use of ICT in the process of learning English allows improving the level of knowledge, competence, and practical skills of students increases. ICT provides unhindered access to communication directly with native English speakers. However, the efficiency of implementing and using ICT to improve the English language proficiency substantially depends on the skills of using such technologies both among teachers who use ICT in the educational process, and students who use ICT to elevate their knowledge, skills, and communicative competence in English.

Thus, proceeding from the relevance of the subject of blended learning in learning English, *the purpose of this study* is a selection of tools for creative learning of English according to the blended learning methodology and establishing their impact on the level of English language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many well-known foreign and Ukrainian authors have worked and continue to work on the study of the specific features of learning English in a blended learning environment and solving related problems. The team of researchers led by O. Bezliudnyi adheres to the position that the use of blended learning methods in English language classes in institutions of higher education is one of the promising areas of training specialists with knowledge of English [6]. Thus, learning English in a blended learning environment allows improving your speech skills in English by watching a variety of videos online, where information can be obtained directly from native speakers. Researchers note that it is possible to learn English in a blended learning environment using various personal devices at the same time, for example, mobile phones, MP3 players, and modern software [6]. Blended learning provides students with a new opportunity to learn additional material in English. M. Prokopchuk claims that the main functions of blended learning in the context of learning English by students of institutions of higher education are as follows [7]:

- 1) a cognitive function that can be used to obtain information using computer technologies and internet resources;
- 2) developing function, according to which students activate the knowledge and ability to read and write in English, form and develop photo-visual competencies, non-linear thinking competencies, information hygiene competencies, as well as socio-emotional communication competencies between members of an English-speaking society;
- 3) training function, according to which students learn how to perform tasks independently, check their personal level of English proficiency thanks to not only a teacher who

evaluates their knowledge, but also using various online platforms and applications;

4) diagnostic function, according to which English language teachers can monitor the knowledge and professional competencies acquired by students.

Upon studying the practices of using creative English language learning tools in foreign institutions of higher education, a team of researchers led by H. Andriianova identifies such models of English language learning that are used in foreign institutions of higher education in blended learning conditions as follows [8]:

1) *Face-to-Face Driver* model (according to this model, the educational process takes place in conditions of live communication between students and teachers, during which students study the basic part of the educational material);

2) *Rotation* model (the use of this educational model allows dividing students' learning of educational material in English into two parts – students study one part of the educational material in full-time learning, being in classrooms, and the other – in distance learning);

3) *Flex* model (according to this educational model, students learn most of the volume of educational material independently, while using the information provided on online resources; teachers conduct consultations for students to study complex topics);

4) *Online lab* model (according to this educational model, students learn English within the framework of the institutions of higher education, but the educational process is based on the use of an electronic type of training in classrooms with computer equipment);

5) *Self-blend* model (this training model offers students to take additional training courses to elevate the basic knowledge gained in the learning process);

6) *Online Driver* model (according to this model, the educational process is built based online platforms, using which students learn new knowledge of English and acquire professional and communicative competencies; however, the teacher's participation in training is not excluded because they must also conduct full-time classes and consultations).

Thus, focusing on the problems of learning English in a blended learning environment, the questions of the specific features of using creative English language learning tools in a blended learning environment are not fully covered.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological framework of this study is the academic achievements of foreign and Ukrainian researchers towards determining the features of learning English in a blended learning environment. The study is based on the coverage of the idiosyncrasy of the introduction of blended learning methods for learning English by students of the institutions of higher education, concurrently focusing on the practice of using this approach by teachers of the Department of English and foreign languages of the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University. To achieve the purpose of the study used: 1) methods

of abstraction, theoretical analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction – to present the research-to-practice foundations of the influence of tools of creative learning of English on the academic achievements of students in learning English as exemplified by Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University.

The information basis of the study comprises the results of a questionnaire survey conducted on the example of institutions of higher education, wherein the authors of the study engage in teaching activities. The survey was attended by 34 students of the 3rd year of non-philosophical specialties studying at the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, 57 students of the 2nd year of the specialty "secondary education (English language and literature; specialty: German/French/Russian)", studying at the Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, and 48 students of the 3rd year of the specialty "Secondary Education (language and literature (English))", receiving higher education at the Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University. Students learning English at the Olesya Honchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, and Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University had to answer 5 questions of the questionnaire, namely:

Question 1. Why do you think you need to learn English?

- a) this is the main requirement of the future profession;
- b) for family communication;
- c) for personal pleasure;
- d) for superiority over others in different areas of life.

Question 2. How do you feel about the introduction of ICT and creative learning tools in the educational process?

- a) positive;
- b) neutral;
- c) negative;
- d) difficult to answer.

Question 3. Do you learn English using ICT and creative learning tools?

- a) yes;
- b) not always;
- c) no;
- d) difficult to answer.

Question 4. First of all, what ICT and creative learning tools do you think can improve your English proficiency?

- a) electronic reference books and dictionaries;
- b) multimedia technologies;
- c) project work on the Internet;
- d) online platforms;
- e) social networks;
- f) blogs;
- g) online resources for communication;
- h) mobile apps;
- i) all answers are correct.

Question 5. In your opinion, has your level of English proficiency increased due to the introduction of ICT and the use of creative learning tools in the process of learning English?

- a) yes;

- b) it would be fair to say it has improved;
- c) no;
- d) difficult to answer.

The obtained results of the questionnaire survey were processed using the data processing method and presented in the main section based on the method of plotting graphs and diagrams.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General characteristics of the method of creative learning of English in a blended learning environment

The practice of institutions of higher education towards conducting training sessions in English demonstrates that today the educational process mainly takes place in a blended learning environment. Thanks to this method of organising the educational process, the classic conventional approach to learning is combined with the distance learning regime, which is especially effective in modern conditions that have developed both in Ukraine and in the world in the light of pandemic restrictions.

Blended learning, being a new method of learning English, allows using modern interactive and innovative technologies in the process of learning English, so that the conventional educational process becomes a more creative process, which is based on an innovative approach to students' acquisition of communicative competencies in English. Blended learning allows using the accumulated positive practices of classical learning, complementing it with modern technological innovations [2]. Practice demonstrates that the modern model of blended learning is described by the following facts [9]:

1) students get access to all the materials necessary for performing practical tasks, students can also use these materials for self-study because all educational materials are presented not only in printed form, but usually most of

them are available in electronic format;

2) the teacher of such a learning model should make a resource map wherein they should indicate where students should get the educational material from, that is, indicate which of the educational material is available in printed form, which can be used with computer tools, since this material is in electronic form, and which is available on the Internet;

3) classes can take place online, where communication between the teacher and students takes place in chats, forums, and blogs;

4) a special feature of blended learning is that it allows conducting lectures in the form of audio and video presentation of educational material to students.

Independent work of students using information and communication technologies contributes to the development of creative potential among students, as well as encourages them to acquire additional knowledge. Focusing on the tools of creative learning of English in a blended learning environment, an important role in this process is played by various interactive tools that also expand their functions and opportunities for use under the influence of the development of science and technology. Thanks to the use of information and communication technologies in the process of learning English, students have the opportunity to assess their knowledge of the language through passing online tests. Teachers, for their part, can also evaluate the student's knowledge that they have mastered while learning English online. Online platforms are equally important for creative learning of English. Each of the presented online platforms on the Internet is aimed at improving the level of English proficiency of its users. Such platforms are designed specifically for different levels of students' English proficiency. As for the features of learning English in a blended learning environment, this method, compared with other educational methods, has numerous advantages (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Advantages of using the blended learning methodology in the process of learning English

Source: developed by the authors based on [10; 11; 12]

The advantages of online platforms in learning English by students of institutions of higher education are as follows:

1) mobility, which is expressed in the availability of educational material for each student and its processing, regardless of the place of residence and time (but a special basis for this should be the presence of an internet connection);

2) Systematic, which indicates that the assimilation of educational material by students is gradual, since the curriculum provided by the platform is specially designed for the needs and level of knowledge of each student; students must gradually assimilate the educational material provided by the platform programme;

3) interactivity, since the educational process developed based on interactive platforms requires the use of modern innovative technologies;

4) controllability of knowledge, that is, the teacher, even without communicating with the student live, has the opportunity to evaluate the level of knowledge acquired by the student and the acquired competencies.

Based on the information provided in [13-15], it is determined that teaching English in a blended learning environment takes place through the use of modern information and interactive technologies. For creative learning of English in modern conditions, the following modern online tools are used [16]:

1) online dictionaries, including Cambridge online dictionary, Oxford online dictionary, ABBYY, Reverso Context online dictionary, and Lingvo Live dictionary, which are quite effective (with this interactive tool, students get information about the pronunciation of a word in the British and American versions of English pronunciation. These dictionaries also provide information about how each word is interpreted and what context it is used in; interpreting the meaning of a word in English considerably expands the vocabulary, so students learn even more words);

2) online news, viewing which the student gets the opportunity to develop listening skills and substantially expand their vocabulary;

3) chat, where the teacher and students participate (the main focus of this tool is aimed at developing students' writing skills);

4) conduct conversations and conferences using various interactive applications, such as Skype or Viber, or interactive platforms, such as Zoom and Google Meet;

5) social networks, among which the use of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, etc. is especially popular; for example, when learning English, the posts of famous people in English become interesting to students and students try to understand their meaning, sometimes commenting on these posts also in the language of the author of such posts;

6) mobile applications, the use of which allows students to learn additional practical material, which eventually becomes an essential tool for consolidating the acquired knowledge.

Practices of creative learning of English in the context of Ukrainian higher education

In accordance with the above, it is advisable to consider the practices of implementing creative foreign language learning in blended learning of Ukrainian higher education institutions. Thus, teachers of the Departments of English and foreign languages of the Olesya Gonchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, and Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University offer students to use the following online platforms:

1) online platform Quizlet, based on there are specially designed modules for testing students' knowledge of English (apart from standard modules, the platform also allows developing individual modules for individual specialities of students; based on the platform, one can also listen to the correct pronunciation of words that are new to students, this, for its part, is a good tool for correcting mistakes that students make when learning English);

2) online platform Freerice, based on which in the process of learning English, users, that is, both students and teachers, have the opportunity to learn about the meaning of words that they do not understand (this substantially increases the level of vocabulary because, learning the meaning of words, students and teachers also remember synonyms of unknown words; students can use this platform with any level of English proficiency);

3) online platform Learn English from the British Council, based on which there are a numerous developed flash exercises that can be performed by a student who speaks any level of English, since these exercises are specially grouped by the English proficiency level;

4) online platform Vocabulary.com which provides students with the opportunity to learn new words in their speciality, since the process of learning words is based on associations and illustrations.

Among other online tools that also have positive teacher recommendations and are used quite efficiently in a blended learning environment is the Microsoft Teams online platform. At the same time, to facilitate the process of mastering the English language, it is advisable to use the Flipgrid application. The use of this application for the user, especially for students, is free of charge. The main purpose of using the app is to develop communication skills because students can create short video responses and take part in video conversations according to the topic of the lesson. The popularity of using this application has increased especially now, when all institutions of higher education, considering the conditions of pandemic restrictions, provide training for students in distance learning mode.

Thanks to modern interactive tools, teachers get the opportunity to remotely monitor the educational and cognitive activities of students because this does not require face-to-face contact with each student to determine what level of knowledge they have gained while learning English.

The use of interactive tools by teachers in learning English contributes to more intensive interaction of students with each other, because tasks usually take place in groups, develop critical thinking, and improve focus on learning. Educational practice demonstrates that by communicating online, students are more actively involved in discussions and vividly discuss educational problems. Notably, communication with native speakers plays an essential role in improving the level of English proficiency. Considering that full-time communication of students with native speakers is quite limited, but the practice of remote communication with native speakers through the use of modern tools is quite common in Ukrainian institutions of higher education, in particular, it is actively implemented by teachers of the Departments of English and foreign languages of the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda

University in Pereiaslav, Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University. In this context, the authors of this study can also state the importance of analysing the practices of foreign institutions of higher education in improving the educational and cognitive process of learning English and studying modern tools that are efficiently used for creative learning of English by students in the process of online communication with native speakers of a foreign language.

Furthermore, the authors conducted a survey based on the study of the impact of creative English language learning tools on students' academic achievements in learning English. The results of the survey demonstrated that the majority of students, which is 46% of respondents, study English, since this is the main requirement of their future profession (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Statistics of students' responses to the question "Why do you think you need to learn English?"

At the same time, the answers to the second question demonstrate that 84% of the surveyed students indicated their "positive" attitude towards the introduction of ICT

and creative learning tools in the process of mastering the English language (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Statistics of students' responses to the question "How do you feel about the introduction of ICT and creative learning tools in the educational process?"

As for the use of information and communication technologies and creative tools when learning English, 92% of respondents prefer such practices, while 3% of students surveyed do not always express a desire to learn English using ICT, and 5% of students find it difficult to answer this question. At the same time, to the question "What ICTs and

creative tools can improve the English language proficiency level?", 95% of the surveyed students noted the importance of electronic reference books and dictionaries, multimedia technologies, project work on the Internet, online platforms, social networks, blogs, online resources for communication and mobile applications in improving their personal level

of English language proficiency. 1% of the surveyed students preferred multimedia technologies, and 4% – online resources for communication. 89% of the surveyed students

expressed their opinion on improving the level of English language proficiency due to the introduction of ICT and creative learning tools in the process of learning English (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Statistics of students' responses to the question "In your opinion, has your level of English proficiency increased due to the introduction of ICT and the use of creative learning tools in the process of learning English?"

Thus, the results of the survey demonstrated an increase in students' academic performance in learning English. In particular, it is established that students learn English because knowledge of English is one of the requirements for future employment, as well as from the standpoint that English creates advantages over different spheres of life. The majority of students surveyed noted their positive attitude towards the introduction of ICT and creative learning tools in the educational process of teaching English. At the same time, students noted the importance of using such ICT in learning English as electronic reference books and dictionaries, multimedia technologies, project work on the Internet, online platforms, social networks, blogs, online resources for communication, mobile applications, multimedia technologies, and online resources for communication. Almost 9 of the students who took part in the survey noted the importance and positive impact of ICT and creative learning tools on the results of improving the English language proficiency level.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, in the course of this study, it was found that the use of interactive and innovative tools in learning English increases the level of students' language acquisition. The

presence of a high level of efficiency from the use of such tools in a blended learning environment is confirmed. The study covered the practices of using modern information and communication technologies in the conditions of blended learning in Ukrainian institutions of higher education, in particular, using the example of the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, and Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University. The most common creative tools for learning English have been identified, including such online platforms as Quizlet, Freerice, Learn English from the British Council, Vocabulary.com, Microsoft Teams, online dictionaries, interactive tools, mobile apps, etc.

In this paper, the study of the influence of ICT and creative English language learning tools on students' academic achievements in learning English was conducted using a questionnaire method on the example of the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, the Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav, and the Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University. The results of the survey demonstrated that students actively use ICT and creative English language learning tools to master English at a high level, which is the basis for further research on the practical vector of the chosen problem.

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Сучасні інструменти креативного вивчення англійської мови в умовах змішаного навчання: досвід українських ЗВО

Анотація. Практика викладання англійської мови в закладах вищої освіти засвідчує ефективність та водночас популярність застосування методики змішаного навчання. Метою наукової статті є визначення інструментів креативного вивчення англійської мови в умовах змішаного навчання та встановлення їхнього впливу на рівень оволодіння англійською мовою. Для розкриття мети дослідження використано методи теоретичного та емпіричного спрямування, зокрема абстрагування, теоретичного аналізу, синтезу, індукції та дедукції, спостереження, анкетного опитування, опису, порівняння і узагальнення. Встановлено, що змішане навчання, як нова методика вивчення англійської мови, передбачає використання в освітньому процесі сучасних інтерактивних та інноваційних технологій, завдяки чому традиційний освітній процес перетворюється на креативний процес із інноваційним підходом до здобуття студентами професійних компетентностей. Визначено, що використання інформаційно-комунікативних технологій в умовах змішаного навчання розкриває перед студентами можливості до самостійного вивчення навчального матеріалу, однак такий процес має проходити під керівництвом викладача. Доведено, що не менш важливого значення для креативного вивчення англійської мови відіграють онлайн-платформи, перевагами яких є мобільність, систематичність, інтерактивність та контрольованість знань. Встановлено, що викладачі кафедр англійської та іноземної мови Дніпровського національного університету імені Олеся Гончара, Університету Григорія Сковороди в Переяславі та Кам'янець-Подільського національного університету імені Івана Огієнка для креативного вивчення англійської мови студентам пропонують використовувати такі онлайн-платформи як Quizlet, Freerice, Learn English from British Council, Vocabulary.com, Microsoft Teams та додаток Flipgrid, ефективність застосування яких підтверджено проведеним анкетуванням студентів. Практичне значення отриманих у дослідженні результатів, вказує на те, що підхід, відповідно до якого передбачено проведення опитування студентів методом анкетування з ціллю виявлення впливу інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій та інструментів креативного вивчення на навчальні досягнення студентів у вивченні англійської мови в українських закладах вищої освіти, має універсальне значення

Ключові слова: методика змішаного навчання, інноваційні та інтерактивні інструменти, онлайн-платформа, освітній процес