

SIX TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS THAT CHANGED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on six technological innovations which have influenced English language teaching and learning. Their potential is analysed and the way suggested how they could be creatively used. In the research part, authors introduce the most popular ones among English teachers and present those they would like to apply within the lessons. Being able to analyse the opposite point of view as well, small number of English students were asked which of these technological tools their English teachers use the most and on the other hand, would like to experience when learning English. In addition, we compare the difference in their choice when teaching and learning English at primary and secondary school.

KEYWORDS

English language, teaching, learning, technology, innovations

1 INTRODUCTION

Traditional classroom-based teaching in which students are just passive recipients of information provided by a teacher has commonly been replaced. Living in the technological age, a wide range of tools which boost the effectiveness of second language teaching and help to avoid boredom and the routine of using only a coursebook can be observed in the classrooms.

In the theoretical part, six of them – whiteboard, smartphone, Skype, blogging, podcasts and online games which, in our opinion, have mostly changed English language teaching and learning will be presented. In the research part, we try to identify the most popular ones among English teachers and those they would like to try within lessons. We analyse whether teachers are willing to experiment with new technologies or they are rather resistant and afraid. In order to get the opposite point of view as well, English students were also asked for their opinions and experience. In addition, we compare whether there is some difference in the choice of technological innovations among English teachers and students at primary and secondary school.

2 THEORETICAL PART

English language teaching is evolving all the time following the technological development. However, which technological innovations have had the strongest impact on teaching English? Six of them were selected which seem to be the most important ones.

Smartphones

Mobile phones are devices that are owned by almost every person in the world. Smartphones are their upper version and they are perfectly known to a younger generation. Especially this group of people use their phones not only to phone or text but mainly for taking pictures, playing games and downloading different apps. Such applications can be used for fun or they can be both funny and educational. Within smartphone apps we chose 4 that focus on general or concrete knowledge, vocabulary, listening comprehension and speaking.

Socratic works on phones, tablets, computers and laptops. The app is for classroom use, it is for free and available for teachers and students. The teacher uses his account to create a public room for a maximum of 50 pupils per session. He makes a list of the students in one group or he can divide them into smaller groups. The teacher creates a quiz, gives a time limit, checks the results and gets the students' feedback and experience. It is a good and entertaining way of testing the knowledge while you do not need any online connection, just a charged battery and a phone that offers Google Play shop.

Wordable is a social English vocabulary game powered by Cambridge dictionary that supports learning by playing fun word games, while the children are able to learn about 3000 most useful general English words from different word packs like newspaper, school, sport, work, travel, etc. There are also 1500 essential work words that cover business, construction, food, housekeeping, retail, etc. The application fulfils the social function because it enables to compete with friends and learners all over the world; it is fun because it tests the English vocabulary in minigames; it accelerates the learning with *wordable*'s memory technology.

Tri Pro English application works exclusively for tablets and mobiles. It brings English exams in three levels – easy, intermediate and advanced. The exercises offer wide range of listening activities for B1, B2 and C2 learners. Each listening part has its reading comprehension questions, the listened text and answer to check the correctness. A big advantage is that learners can study anywhere, anytime and without the need of an Internet connection. It is available at App Store in mobiles and tablets. The exercises can be done individually or within a lesson with a teacher.

Fluent U is a unique app that takes real-word-videos including news, cartoon, music videos, commercials and inspiring talks. We can say this is an untraditional way of learning experience in which students learn English as it is spoken in real life. *Fluent U* contains lots of authentic English materials, so the children are excited while watching their favourite videos pop up in the classroom. All the videos are sorted by skill level and come with built-in language lessons. This type of app is not only used by teachers when writing curriculum but they are also fantastic for students during classroom activities or unstructured classroom time. It is recommended for teachers who want to teach with fun content and whose learners are more likely audio-visual. It is not only great for in-class activities but also for group projects and solo homework assignments. The good news is that the app is also for free available in the App Store.

Google Translate is definitely the app that everyone who learns or teach foreign languages should have on their phone. It can translate almost all the languages, not just English, and can be used in many activities. It has wide usage – either when being abroad, travelling or working on a project outside the classroom. This program also brings a disadvantage which comes with translating whole sentences. Learners must be careful

because the translator functions on a word by word translation configuration and this can lead to misunderstanding or wrong translation of the words.

Google Docs is a free web-based application where the files and spreadsheets are created, edited and stored online. Those can be installed to an Android phone, iPod or tablet from the Google Play apps. To access the files, it is required to have an Internet connection and this can be a disadvantage. Such documents can be saved on *Google Drive* which is a safe place for not only these types of documents but also pictures or videos. They are reachable from any smartphone, tablet or computer. Within Google Drive disk we can highlight its good points mentioned in the Google Play Store:

- safely store your files and access them from anywhere,
- search for files by name and content,
- easily share files and folders with others,
- quickly view your content,
- set access levels for who can view, comment, or edit,
- quickly access recent files,
- see file details and activity,
- enable viewing of files offline,
- use your device camera to scan in paper documents,
- access pictures and videos from Google Photos.

Whiteboard

“Interactive whiteboards (IWBs) have become more and more prevalent in the classroom over the years. And it is no wonder – the benefits are vast and offer teachers new, inventive ways to demonstrate core and supplemental concepts. As children become more familiar with smart technology at home, the classroom is catching up and teachers are using the benefits of technology to their advantage. Even more exciting are the advantages this technology offers students” (Hosman, 2017).

As Hosman continues, using interactive whiteboards (IWBs) teachers have much more opportunities for learners to engage. Most of the learners are visual which means they use colours, pictures, images to organize, separate and learn information so the existing curriculum can be supported by videos, moving diagrams, stories or online content. In other words, teachers can increase student interest by adding stimulating visual aids to new and existing curriculum and moreover everything what is done on the computer can be seen on the IWB.

We need to mention that the IWB is a digital aid and it works under electricity, so when it is suddenly off, the teachers must improvise and find another way of how to make the learning process interesting and innovative for students.

Skype

Skype was released 15 years ago, in 2003, and therefore it might difficult to perceive it as a modern technology. However, its potential for teaching English is undoubtable. It is an easy and inexpensive way which gives students and teachers an opportunity to connect with the outside world without leaving their seats. In the language classroom, learners can contact native speakers everywhere in the world and fine-tune their English language skills. Learning becomes more authentic, inspirational and engaging when it transcends the walls of the classroom (Krishnasamy, Raman, 2015, p. 21). Skype can be used to provide a variety of authentic language experiences, including an interview with an English author or the international collaborative projects with other classrooms. Moreover, it does not have to be used only for developing

speaking skills. Function of instant messaging and chatting is great for students who need to practise writing and reading skills.

Although Skype could be arguably considered less sophisticated than other web or video conferencing tools, its simplicity makes it an accessible tool for teachers who are reluctant to use technology due to lack of skills, confidence or high levels of anxiety.

Podcasts

A podcast is an audio or video file which is produced in a series and could be broadcast via Internet or downloaded to a computer or mobile device (Müllner, 2009, p. 3). In terms of language teaching, students can listen to existing podcasts and to improve listening comprehension or to create their own podcasts and to practise speaking skills. Both options are much more engaging than traditional listening and speaking tasks included in the coursebooks mainly because of students' independence in the choice of topics. It is recommended to encourage them to find a podcast that takes their attention and to listen regularly.

There are many existing resources that can be used for language learning purposes. Firstly, authentic podcasts are released by broadcasters from all over the world and are primarily intended for native speakers, but they can expose students to natural language use. Secondly, language learning podcasts are focused on the specific area of language, e.g. vocabulary, colloquial language, idiomatic phrases or grammatical structures. According to Hashmi and Jain (2013, p. 159), this web-based environment effectively narrows the gap between the formal English which dominates most second language classroom and the informal English used in most real-life communication events. It provides them with plenty of meaningful language use which is highly desirable for second language acquisition (Hashmi, Jain, 2013, p. 159). In addition, they specify the following concrete activities which could be used within English lesson:

- Podcasts containing conversations between the native speakers,
- Podcasts based on that encourage careful listening by the learners,
- Podcasts based on comprehension activities, interviews and vocabulary,
- Podcasts based on idiomatic expressions with their usages,
- Story-based podcasts followed by listening comprehension questions.

If students decide to create their own podcast, they can do it individually or as a group, introducing some interesting personal information, stories or book and film reviews. With the rapid growth of technology, it is now easy for teachers and students to produce podcast. All they need is a computer, the Internet and a headset. In addition, they can upload these podcasts to the school website, so the other students could listen to them as well. As Nuan (1995) points out more the learners practise podcast texts, rehearse them and record them, the more proficiency will come in their speech.

Blogging

While podcasts can serve as a great toll for improving learners' listening and speaking skills, blogging mainly focuses on the area of reading and writing. A blog is a frequently updated website that often resembles an online journal. In terms of English language teaching, class blog could be used as a shared space, in which teacher and students can actively participate on building its content. According to Stanley (2006), it is a way of opening up the classroom walls and showing the wider world what is happening and creating a small language learning community.

Blogging builds confidence, self-expression, autonomous learning and provides a space in which even the shyest students can participate. Within the scope of classroom-based blog activities, assignments can require the student blogger to communicate closely with a specific group of student bloggers. Moreover, reading and writing the blog can be almost instantaneous or at home. This combination of planned and spontaneous communicative exchanges inside and outside the classroom makes blogging a meaningful and engaging social exercise (Blackstone, Naganuma, Spiri, 2007, p. 2). Its multimedia features, simple web

publishing, interactivity and ability to support cooperative and autonomous learning confirm the fact that blogs can effectively facilitate language teaching and learning.

Research conducted on 42 English students reflects that majority of them (78 %) enjoyed posting, reading classmates' and teachers' posts and making comments on them (Aggarwal, Ahluwalia, Gupta, 2011, p. 38). It should be also pointed that the role of teacher and classmates is crucial – when students upload their posts on the blogs and receive comments and feedback from their peers and teachers, they feel highly motivated and learning is much more effective.

Online Games

Online games are primarily perceived as the source of entertainment; however, they can be also used for teaching English. Using online games in the language classroom requires much more preparation for teachers than using books but Seli (2015, p. 5) states that when learners start playing the game they will be eager to solve the problems, answer the questions and complete the mission to go to the next level. This opinion has been also proved by research findings showing that English students playing online language games tend to learn more appropriately, could retain the new words for a longer period of time and retrieve more words in comparison to those who are not provided with such games (Kwan, Yip, 2006). If the games are fun, relaxing, motivating and confidence boosting, the learners' interest will increase. Nevertheless, to guarantee learning effectiveness, games which provide students with a sense of achievement and scope for development are required.

Among the most popular, *The Grammar of Doom* is an adventure-style game where learners explore secrets hidden within an old, magical temple. There are 10 rooms in the temple, and each room has its own series of puzzles that have to be solved using English grammar and vocabulary to move to the next room and eventually beat the game. It needs to be stressed, that online games do not have to be necessarily used for teaching and practising only vocabulary or grammar. *The Call of Duty* series include some of the most popular action games of all time. In these games, students play the role of a soldier, where with their classmates work together to defeat the other team. It is based on voice chat feature where they can come up with strategies and have conversations.

2 RESEARCH PART

In the theoretical part, we have introduced six technological innovations which have undoubtedly influenced English language teaching. All of them dispense with a great potential, make teaching and learning more effective, interesting and motivational. On the other hand, some of them are directly dependent on the Internet or financial resources of school and sometimes require even more preparation from English teachers in order make sure that learning objectives will be achieved. Being able to find out how they are perceived by English teachers and students at primary and secondary schools in Slovakia, a small-scale research has been conducted. An online anonymous questionnaire was used as the main research method. At the beginning, we state following research hypotheses – expectations:

1. *Whiteboards for teaching English are used by more primary than secondary school teachers.*
2. *More students at secondary than at primary school would like to experience using smartphones within English lessons.*
3. *More teachers than students would like to experience using Skype within English lessons.*

Being able to find the answer to these research hypotheses, 40 English teachers (20 at primary and 20 at secondary school) were addressed with the following two questions:

1. *Which of the following technological innovations do you use most frequently within English lessons?*

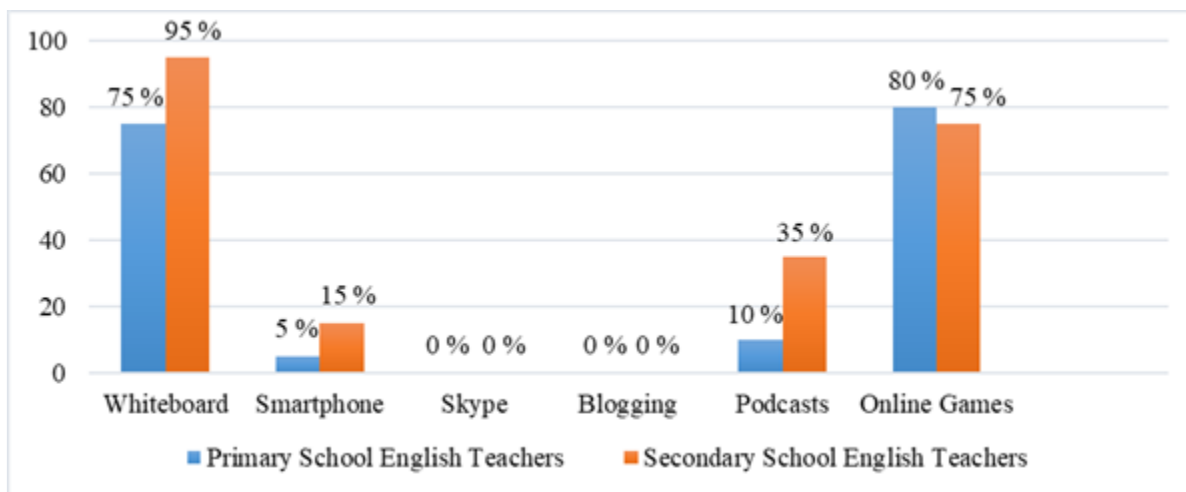


Figure 2 The use of technological innovations among English teachers

Figure 1 reflects that whiteboard is absolutely the most popular technological innovation among English teachers. Since it has been claimed by 75 % of primary and 95 % of secondary school English teachers, it seems that there is not a difference between its frequency of use. However, the lower number of primary school English teachers might be caused by the age and language level of learners. At primary school, more attention is probably paid to drilling exercises and work with a coursebook. Secondly, online games seem to be frequently used as well. It confirms our theoretical assumption that they are not only funny and motivational but also give students a chance to learn, practise and to review English language in a pleasant atmosphere. Unfortunately, only small number of the addressed English teachers prefer smartphones and podcasts for language teaching and none of them use Skype or blogging.

2. Which of the following technological innovations would you like to apply within English lessons?

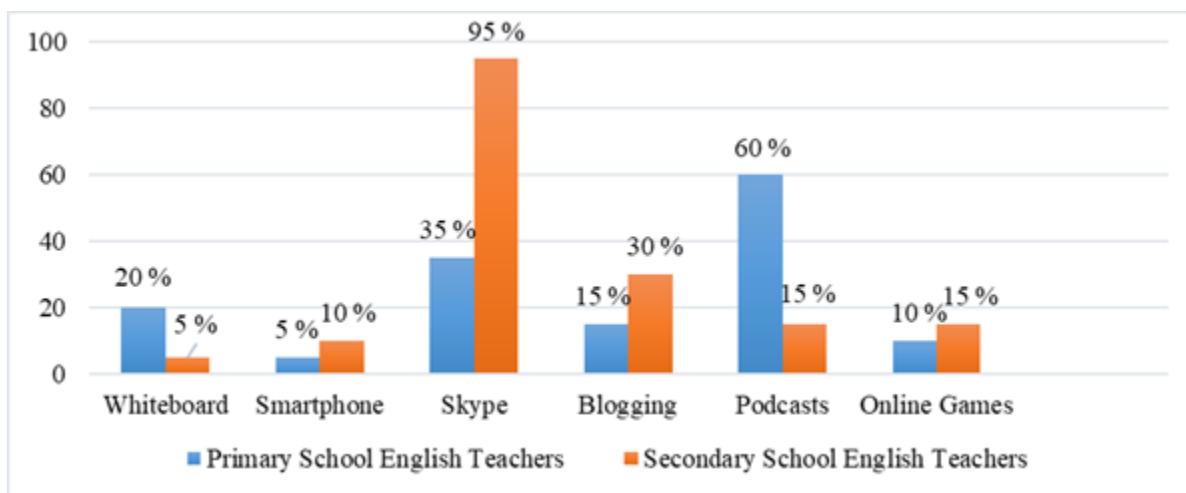


Figure 2 Technological innovations that English teachers would like to try within lessons

Figure 2 shows that teachers are willing to use smartphones, Skype, blogging or podcasts and are not afraid of their use. However, there is a difference in the choice among primary and secondary school English teachers. While majority (95 %) of secondary school English teachers would prefer trying Skype, more than half (60 %) of primary school English teachers would choose using English podcasts. This result is surprising because according to Figure 1, only 10 % of primary school English teachers use them for language teaching. On the other hand, only small number of English teachers would try blogging and almost

none of them smartphones, probably because all learners would be expected to own one, preferably with the Internet access, what might be financially difficult for schools as well as for some of the students.

Being able to analyse opposite viewpoint as well, 40 English students (20 at primary school, aged 10 – 14 and 20 at secondary school, aged 15 – 18) were asked two similar questions:

1. Which of the following technological innovations does your teacher use most frequently within English lessons?

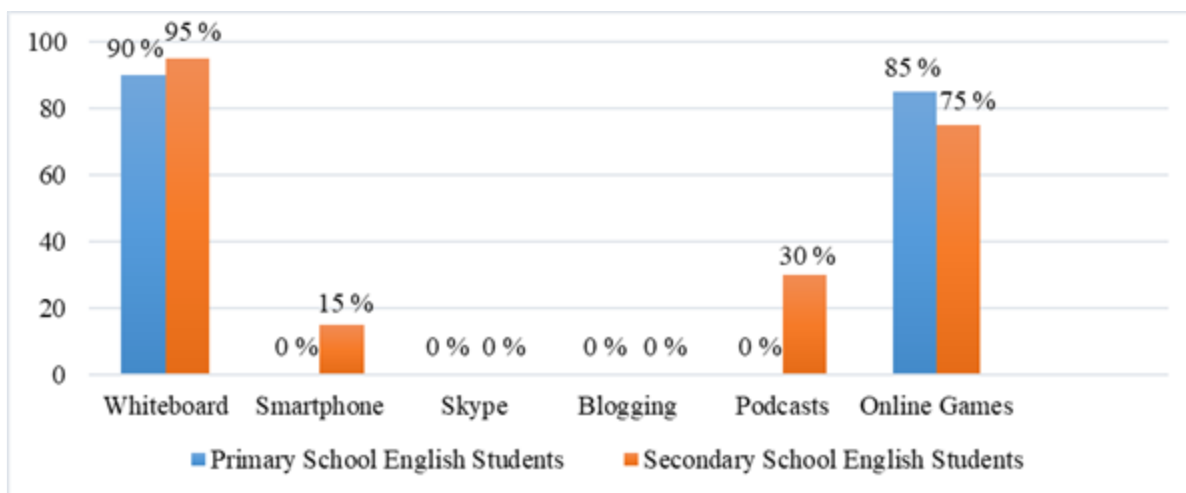


Figure 3 The use of technological innovations for teaching English from students' viewpoint

Figure 3 confirms the results which are reflected in Figure 1. Whiteboard and online games are the most popular technological innovations among English teachers both at primary and secondary school and their dominance for English language teaching is unquestionable. Only small number of English students claimed that they have experienced using smartphones and podcasts within English lessons.

2. Which of the following technological innovations would you like to experience within English lessons?

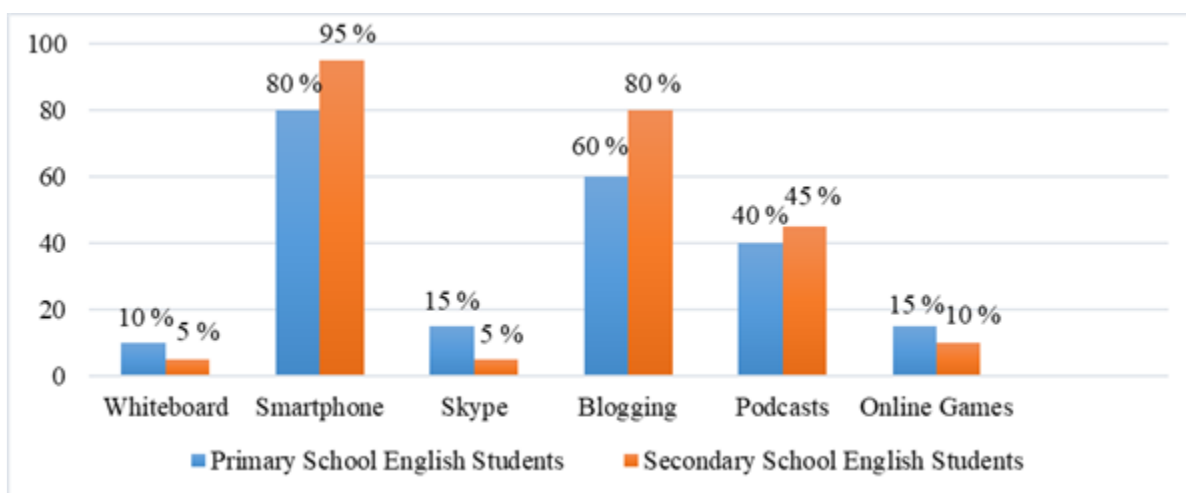


Figure 1 Technological innovations that students would like to experience within English lessons

According to Figure 4, learners have opposite viewpoint in comparison to the teachers when it comes to using new technological innovations within English lessons. Majority of them would like to experience smartphones for learning English, followed by blogging and using podcasts. What is the most important, only small number of English teachers claimed that they would like to try smartphones and blogging, therefore students' expectations are totally different. Research results indicate that English learners,

regardless of age or language level, are more eager to use the latest technological tools, while teachers stick more to traditional ones, which might be also caused by financial resources and technological equipment of schools. In addition, while primary and secondary school English teachers differ in their choice of technological innovations they would like to try for language teaching, students' opinions are much more homogeneous.

To conclude, our first research hypothesis has been rejected because more teachers at secondary (95 %) than at primary (75 %) school use whiteboard within English lessons. On the other hand, second research hypothesis has been proved because more students at secondary (95 %) than at primary (80 %) school would like to experience using smartphones for English language learning. Finally, the third research hypothesis has been proved as well because more teachers than students would like to try using Skype within English lessons.

CONCLUSION

Today's learners and young people belong to ICT generation who are able to serve a phone, computer or tablet at early pre-school age. They spend on their phone from five to six hours a day on average. All the technology is well known to them and it seems they are able to work with electronic devices in or outside the classroom.

The research showed that a whiteboard and online games are frequently used within English lessons either at primary or secondary schools. Teachers find the whiteboard helpful, easy to control, and although it has been in use for years, it is still more interesting than using a traditional blackboard. The opinions of primary and secondary teachers do not differentiate which was also confirmed by the students. On the other hand, smartphones and podcasts are rarely used for teaching English while Skype or blogging are not used at all. The survey also showed that teachers would like to try or experience new technology innovations and forms of teaching English but they are maybe afraid. The reason can be, for example, finances, lack of equipment or fear of losing control while using smartphones within lessons.

There were found opinion differences between primary and secondary teachers about using the technology; this can be caused by age or language level of learners. Based on our questionnaire, primary school English teachers would welcome podcasts while those at secondary school would vote for Skype. Although the questioned teachers are for innovations in teaching, they are not very keen on smartphones or blogging and would never try it. Students' reaction was unsurprisingly different – smartphones and blogging are the means they would definitely try within their English lessons.

Nevertheless, due to the low number of participants, the research results could not be globalized and they provide just the introduction into the topic. In order to gain a more complex picture, more of them should be addressed for the future research. In addition, it needs to be stressed that a huge age difference between primary and secondary school English learners could distort the results. Younger learners might have opposite choices in comparison to the older ones. However, the attention should be paid to the fact that there seems to be differences between expectations of students and teachers which technological innovations should be used for English language teaching and learning in general.

Available literature, websites, apps or materials offer a huge range of teaching ideas. Teachers are able to choose from various programs that might interest their students. The generation of children who grew up on using computers, tablets and phones would like to be motivated in a new and up-to-date way.

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