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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING TECHNOLOGY (ONLINE VISUAL DICTIONARY) IN TEACHING AND ACQUIRING VOCABULARY A STUDY CONDUCTED AT SEEU

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Abstract. *Teaching English has changed significantly during the recent past years. These changes are the result of the new teaching methods, techniques, and of incorporating technology and its instruments into the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL).*
The incorporation of technology in teaching is something very innovative and potentially beneficial to teachers and learners. It is attractive, motivating as well as very challenging, especially in teaching vocabulary.
However, this study aims to examine the efficiency of technology, in the shape of the online visual dictionary in teaching and acquiring vocabulary. The study aims to answer such questions as: does it assist learners to acquire newly presented vocabulary more easily, to remember and use it? Does it facilitate the teaching and learning of new words? Does it make classes more appealing to students?

Key words: *acquisition, vocabulary, technology, online visual dictionary, teaching*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent past years, a greater importance has been dedicated to the process of teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language. Different teaching methods and techniques have been used to see what works best in the classroom, what would trigger students' interest in the subject, make them participate actively and work independently, with the teacher as the guide, not the only available resource in the classroom. With the introduction of technology in teaching, many things changed, the teacher's role now is the role of the guide, facilitator, the one who shows them the available resources, the students work on their own, or with their peers to solve the given assignments or tasks.

Nowadays, the incorporation of technology in teaching is a necessity, because we are surrounded by technology in our everyday lives, we use it for work, studying, entertainment, news, games, and many other purposes. We are familiar with it, and by incorporating it in our language classes we can all benefit from it, we can make the best of our classes, in which the students learn, participate actively, and enjoy what they are doing, and they can witness what they learn and witness their progress themselves.

There are many different ways in which we can incorporate technology in our language classes, it is our duty to choose the best possible way and activities in order to achieve our objectives, i.e. have successful language classes. The main focus of this study is to investigate the efficiency of technology in language teaching and learning.

The objectives of this study are the following:

to determine the efficiency of technology, specifically, of the online visual dictionary in the acquisition of new vocabulary;

- to find out whether it facilitates learning of words;
- to evaluate how the online visual dictionary enhances vocabulary acquisition;
- to find out whether it enables students to remember new words and use them later;
- to find out whether using technology in teaching vocabulary is more appealing to students.

These objectives will be accomplished through the employment of qualitative and quantitative methods in analysing the collected data. The primary focus of this study will be in contributing to the quality of the teaching and learning process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As teachers, we bear much more responsibilities that one might think of, we are occupied most of our time with what to do next class? How to make classes more interesting to students? How to make complex things easier? How to make things more understandable and how to help our students to achieve what they are supposed to achieve during their studies? Moreover, we want to involve our students in the process itself, to make them take some charge of their learning, so that they are aware of how much they have progressed since the beginning. Since, as language teachers we deal with mixed ability students, students from different language, cultural, and religious backgrounds, we need to adopt one lesson to meet the needs of all the students present. This is best described with the famous quote by Benjamin Franklin "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

It is proven that by involving technology in our classes we can do all of that at once, it is motivating, challenging, interesting and makes students work harder to accomplish the tasks, as we want to make our students to benefit as much as possible from our classes.

This paper is focused on the effects of technology in teaching vocabulary. There are many ways in which we can use technology and its tools to teach vocabulary, in our case, we have used the online visual dictionary which offers the definition of the word, it tells students whether it is a noun or verb, and they see the pictures of the word searched. A visual dictionary is a dictionary that primarily uses pictures to illustrate the meaning of words. Visual dictionaries are often organized by themes instead of being an alphabetical list of words.

As I have already stated above, we want to make our classes interesting, our main aim is to motivate and challenge our students by using technology to teach a certain vocabulary lesson, and this is best supported with Dogra (2010) who claims that technology affected students in a way which increased their motivation, students are much more willing to participate when technology is incorporated than in traditional classes and tasks. He also claims, that students felt more self-confident with technology in the classroom.

This especially applies to students nowadays, because all of them have computers and the Internet at homes, which means that they are already familiar with how it works, and there will be no such difficulties in the classroom. The main purpose of using technology is to make students participate actively in the lessons, they look for the answer themselves, they do not only rely on the teacher, and perceive the teacher as the only source of information.

Different scholars talk about the importance of vocabulary in language teaching. There is no easy way to teach students vocabulary, that is why teachers worldwide use

different methods and techniques. When combined with the learners' different learning stlyes it becomes even more complicated. That is why we tried to see how the incorporation of technology and especially the online visual dictionary affected the learning of the vocabulary in the target language.

Baker talks about the importance of vocabulary, he says that vocabulary is the largest part when learning another language. Baker (2002, 51) claims that "learning vocabulary is perhaps the largest and most laborious aspect of acquiring another language". Furthermore, Willis (2003) discusses the importance of grammar and vocabulary in the process of acquiring a second or foreign language. However, vocabulary appears to be way more important, because in order to produce sentences and to communicate we do certainly need vocabulary than grammar.   He, (Willis 2003) argues that grammar is an important part of language, knowing the grammar basics, rules and patterns is very important, but getting the message across is even more important. In communication, the most important thing is not to produce grammatically correct sentences, rather than to get the message across to the listener, the person you are talking to, because if there is a lack of words, there will be no communication at all.

Furthermore, the importance of vocabulary is showed by Decarrico (2001, 285) who points out that "vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition whether it is a second, or a foreign language. Even in a learner's mother tongue, there is an incessant learning of new words and new meanings for old words." Vocabulary is not seen important only by the teachers, the students also see vocabulary as an essential part of the language they are learning.

Richards (1997, 7), as cited in (Zimmerman 1997, 5), claims that "Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner." Since, the importance of vocabulary is admitted and has been discussed by different scholars, such as Baker (2002), Willis (2003), Decarrico (2001) and Richards (1997), we want to teach our students by using the most modern ways, we want to make the process of vocabulary acquisition an easy and pleasant one, where we have the attention of the students to the maximum, where students are willing and motivated to learn and be active participants in their learning. This is what we investigated in our study, this was able by incorporating technology, and specifically the onlive visual dictionary, in our case.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is carried out at South East European University, Tetovo, the Republic of Macedonia, in the academic year 2011/2012. Two types of data collection were applied; a questionnaire which the students filled in, and two quizzes, each of them given to the students after the vocabulary lesson, to determine how much they have learned from each method, and which one shows to be more effective.

3.1. The study answered the following research questions:

1. How efficient is the online visual dictionary in acquiring vocabulary;
2. Does it facilitate the acquisition of the new words;
3. Does it enable learners to remember new words easier and use them later;
Is the usage of the Online Visual Dictionary more appealing to students?

3.2. Participants

The participants involved in our study are 60 Pre-Intermediate level students, at their first and second year of studies. They are from 18 to 25 years old. All participants are non-native speakers of English, they are Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, etc.

3.3. Procedure

Two vocabulary lessons were presented to the students separately. The former dealing with the human body parts, whereas the latter, with clothes. The first lesson was presented in the classroom with the help of the course book, English Result Pre-Intermediate, and with some extra activities delaing with the noted vocabulary items. The other lesson was presented to the students with the use of the online visual dictionary. The students looked for the new vocabulary item in the visual dictionary, and from the picture they understood what the word meant, they found the word category, whether it was a noun or a verb, and the definition of the word.

3.4. Results

The results of our study are as follows. As far as the first research question is concerned: How efficient is the online visual dictionary in teaching and acquiring vocabulary? It turned out that the Online Visual Dictionary is a very efficient tool in acquiring new vocabulary items. It enabled the students to see the picture of the new word, read the definition of it and use the new word in a sentence. Most importantly, the students were able to use the word in different sentences and contexts. The analysis of the results showed that this method is very effective in the acquisition of the new vocabulary presented in the class, since 87% of students had answered correctly all the quiestions in the quiz that they took after the lesson with teachnology, whereas only 13% of the students did not have all the correct answers.

Second research question: Does the online visual dictionary facilitate the acquisition of the new words? The quiz results showed that the online visual dictionary facilitated the learning of the new words, the images were very helpful to the learners and enabled them acquire the newly presented words. The questionnaire results showed that pictures helped students learn the word and remember it easier. To the question 'Do pictures help you learn easier', 90% of the students claimed that pictures helped them learn and remember the words easier, 5% said that they agreed, 3 % were neutral and only 2% strongly disagreed.

The third Research question of this study: Does it enable learners to remember new words easier and use them later? The questionnaire and quiz results showed that the students remembered and used the new vocabulary items presented to them with the help of the online dictionary easier, without much difficulty. This is best supported by the questionnaire results, where students were asked about whether it helps them remember new words easier, and 92% of the students strongly agreed and only 8% agreed. None of the students were neutral or disagreed.

Finally, the fourth and last research question: Is the usage of the Online Visual Dictionary more appealing to students? The questionnaire results showed that the students found the class in the computer lab, and the lesson with the Online Visual Dictionary very interesting, fun, challenging and at the same time motivating.

To the question 'Do you like learning with computers' 87% of the students said that they prefered computers, 7% said that they agreed, whereas 4% disagreed and 2% were neutral. 94% of the students strongly agreed that having classes with computers helps the

process of learning, as it offers many advantages. Finally, all the students, 100% strongly agreed that they enjoyed classes with technology employed.

The following chart gives the results of the student questionnaire, where students had to answer 10 questions. The results presented in the chart are connected to the results of the reserach questions discussed above.
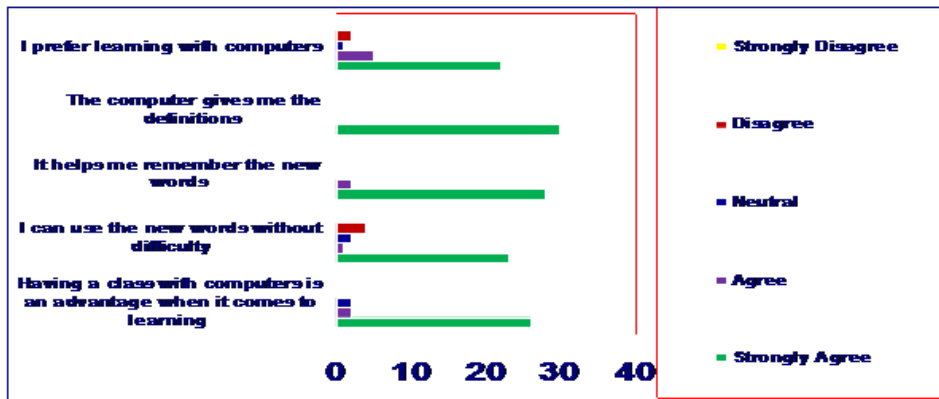

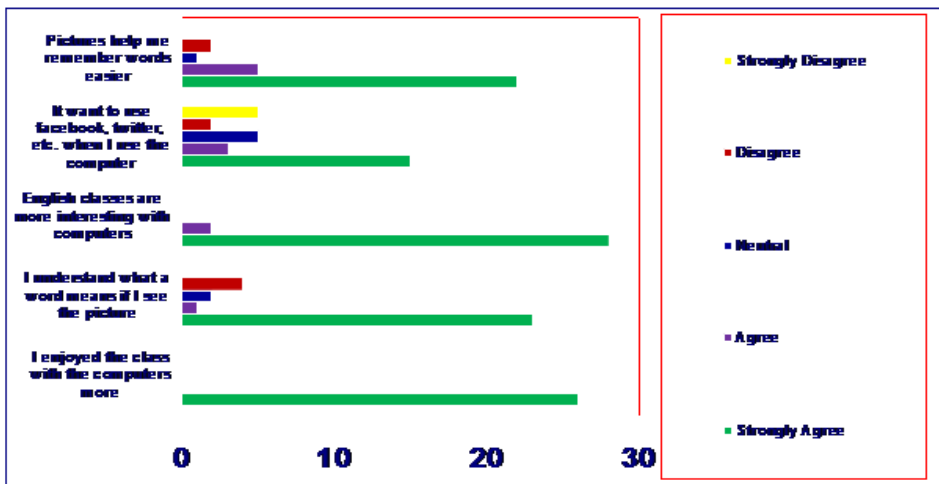Fig. 1 Graph 1. Questionnaire results

Fig. 2 Graph 2. Questionnaire results

4. CONCLUSION

After the analysis of the quiz and questionnaire results we drew the conclusion that the Online Visual Dictionary method showed to be more effective than the conventional teaching method in teaching and learning vocabulary, and in maximizing students' vocabulary gains. This method had several advantages.

First, the students were all actively engaged in the lesson because all of them had to look up the words, read the definition and see whether it is a noun, or a verb. After that all of them had to write sentences with those words. Second, the incorporation of technology gave students some kind of autonomy, they did the activities themselves, and the teacher was only there to guide them. With autonomy, students become more self-confident, and thus succeed in the task. Third, the incorporation of technology is entertaining and fun, the students enjoyed the lesson and they themselves saw how much they had learned when they did the quiz.

The class was much more appealing for both the learners and the teacher. The students had fun while doing the activity and they participated actively throughout the entire class. However, as with computers and young people, there is always the possibility that they would be challenged and tempted to use facebook, and other social networking sites. The teacher was alert to not let that happen, because that would draw the students attention and thus the focus would be shifted from learning to chatting, and the effect of the lesson would be lost.

In the questionnaire results students admitted that they had been tempted to use the social networking sites, since most of the students strongly agreed, however they were not allowed to and stayed focused in the lesson.

To sum it up, the incorporation of technology proved to be a very efficient tool in teaching and learning vocabulary. It made the class in general more interesting, appealing and entertaining, it fostered students' independent work, because they were no longer relying solely on the teacher, and what he said. They did the activities themselves with the teacher only guiding them throughout the activities. The learners acquired the vocabulary, and thus the class with the incorporation of the computer technology, and specifically with the online visual dictionary, was a success. Students were able to use the words learned in sentences, and they were able to use the words throughout the semester whenever they were apropriate to be used.

4.1. Limitations of the study

As any other study, this study has its limitations too. One of the limitations of the study was the small number of students that were involved in the study, 60 students only. The results would have been much more reliable if we had used a bigger sample of students. All of the students involved in the study were at the pre-intermediate level. Thus, the results of this study may not be aplicable to other groups of students, therefore, students from other higher levels, such as: intermediate, upper intermediate level of students, academic and advanced academic English, or ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students should have been involved in the study.
More vocabulary lessons should have been delivered using the same method, and then the results would have been even more reliable and applicable to other groups of students.

Finally, another limitation of this study was the possibility of learners accessing the social networking sites, this can be avoided by administrates blocking such sites.

4.2. Recommendation for further research

The recommendations for further research are the following: a bigger sample of participants should be included, and not only limited to students, teachers should participate too, so as to analyse the teachers' perception of this method.

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