Enhancing EFL students' Communicative Skills by Using Learning Apps

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Abstract - The rapid growth of technology has offered trendy instructional tools for learning English as a foreign language. The world of technology develops fast, attracting new users, among which are university students. With the growing use of mobile technology, students can take advantage of mobile apps to improve their English competence.
This paper will reveal the effects of using Apps as an - learning tool for teaching EFL among university students. Different Apps were used to facilitate communication between the teacher and students and restructure the learning workflow. E-learning technologies offer learners control over the content, learning sequence, pace of learning, time, and often media, allowing them to tailor their experiences to meet their learning objectives (Jethro, Grace& Thomas 2012). One of the biggest advantages of using Apps in language teaching is that it helps students and teachers communicate instantaneously. It endorses paperless communication and allows teachers to create classes, post assignments, organize folders, and view work in real-time.

I. INTRODUCTION

The E-Learning tool "Google Classroom" is used in the South East European University (SEEU) especially in teaching English for ESP. This paper will discuss how the E-Learning Google classroom tool improves students' language skills and activates their independent learning.

Activities and resources which are presented by E-learning are represented with an analysis of how they can be used to advance the language skills and autonomous learning of EFL students. In this aspect, Google classroom helps students' organization by putting all assignments and work in one safe place. It also helps teachers with creating, copying, assigning, supervising, collecting, grading, and returning work to students, which usually requires a great deal of time and steps. Google Classroom simplifies these tasks by merging, removing, or organizing them.

This tool is easy to use as it merely requires teachers and students to learn how to post information and documents and how to locate the information. The SEEU already has access to Google Classroom so, teachers can easily log in and invite students to join the group and follow the activities. Most of the students had already experienced using other Google apps, like Docs or Spreadsheets, so they are set for using Google Classroom.

II. METHOD

In this paper, we wanted to relate ESP students' experience of participating in a blended ESP course. Our research aimed to see whether students were satisfied with using Google Classroom in an ESP context and to learn about their perception of the advantages and disadvantages of using Google classroom. Additionally, we asked them about their attitudes towards communication with other students and the teacher using Google classroom.

Prior to the questionnaire, students were given materials on Google Classroom, namely the lessons that had been previously taught. Moreover, different types of assignments and quizzes were in disposal so that the students could practice and prepare for the examination. To encourage students' participation, they were informed that they would be awarded points for participation, which would be calculated with their final grades.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study are thirty-six SEEU undergraduate students, between the ages of 18-25, male and female, all in the multicultural classroom setting. Their level of proficiency is upper intermediate to advanced level. They study Law and take English for Specific Purposes classes as mandatory courses.
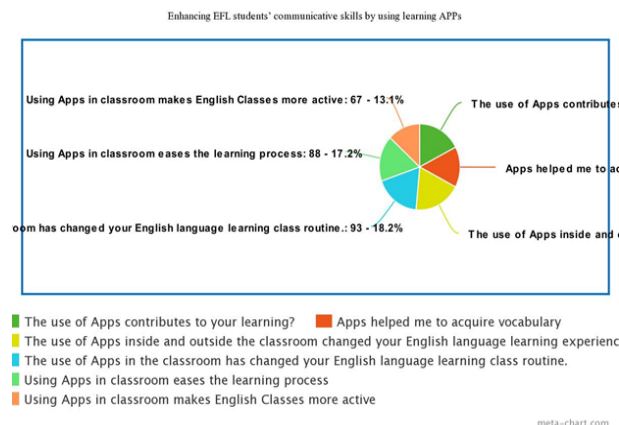
IV. INSTRUMENTS

Study data were collected through student questionnaires that assessed their attitudes toward using Google classroom. The questionnaires were

designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with values 1-5 assigned to each alternative. The teacher had posted the questionnaire in Google classroom.

V. RESULTS

When it comes to using Google classroom in an ESP context, most students claimed that using Google Classroom had positive effects on their learning. Most of them favored the possibility of studying when it suits them, then the possibility of choosing the learning material. A very small number of students stated that they did not like studying employing a computer. Conversely, some students proclaimed that they liked the approach because all the required material was available in one place. Many students stated that having direct contact with a teacher is very important to them as they can comprehend better. Considering the teaching material posted on Google classroom, students were generally satisfied with the material they were provided with. Concerning their opinion on the possible improvement of their knowledge of English almost half of the respondents assumed that their knowledge improved. When it comes to the type of study, students preferred the combination of the two given options: classroom and through computers. As for using technology in an ESP context, most of the students liked it. Regarding the question of whether this kind of communication made it easier for them to follow the lectures, about half of the students expressed that it did not quite make it easier. When asked for the effectiveness of the discussion forums as a useful tool to improve learners' writing skills in English, most students considered forums as helpful for improving writing skills in the target language. Regarding the question of what kind of device students use to access Google classroom, where different possibilities were offered to students, many students chose more than one option and the results assert that the most frequently used device for students is still the personal computer.

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- The use of Apps contributes to your learning?
- Apps helped me to acquire vocabulary
- The use of Apps inside and outside the classroom changed your English language learning experience
- The use of Apps in the classroom has changed your English language learning class routine.
- Using Apps in classroom eases the learning process
- Using Apps in classroom makes English Classes more active

CONCLUSION

Considering the students' responses, it can be argued that digitalization in the classroom has become a necessity: The study revealed that the best option is blended learning. Most respondents pointed at the possibility of choosing time and place that suited them as an advantage. On the other hand, the impossibility to have enough face to face contact with a teacher and other colleagues was counted as a disadvantage. Students' perception was that teaching in the classroom was very beneficial for them as it helped during their learning process. Students declared that they are not willing to do some activities by themselves, for example, reading. Many students were aware of the importance of the teacher in a learning process.

We can easily observe that incorporating Google classroom into the ESP classroom encourages interaction and boosts students' confidence regarding their knowledge of English as well as their independence. Furthermore, they will likely develop learner autonomy, which will help them learn faster and in more diverse ways.

The Internet has opened the doors to knowledge and the construction of a collective intelligence outside the traditional academic structures. Google Classroom is a tool that offers a combination of learning happening inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, the use of Google classroom should be encouraged in any higher education institution, since the main agents in current higher education are students rather than teachers (Attard et al., 2010). Students need to actively participate in their process of knowledge construction, and Google classroom enhances this active participation, access, and sharing of information. The wide variety of activities and resources on the Google classroom needs to be stimulated in the English language Modules to increase the time that students interact with the language. This will motivate students to

work autonomously, which will encourage life-long learning.

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