



Simona Serafimovska¹
Brikena Xhaferi²

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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Abstract: *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language is a regular practice and a world trend, because it is a lingua franca and has a wide application in many life domains. This trend is becoming more pronounced as a result of the application of new technologies in the study of English. The aim of this paper is to show the application of new technologies in the study of the English language with involved teachers from different universities in the Republic of North Macedonia and their comparison with some universities from abroad. Here we introduce the trend of a modern approach to learning English, which has gained a special foothold in the context of the pandemic as it has become necessary to apply new technologies and modern supporters of the new technological process such as different types of platforms. This paper presents the latest insights, opportunities and challenges in learning English in a regional epidemic crisis. New challenges in pandemic conditions have directly contributed to creativity in learning English and the opportunity to master modern technologies, including primarily educational platforms. Up-to-date experiences in teaching English as foreign language confirmed that more than 83% of educational institutions supported an online learning system while up to 93% use an online learning system in their institution to teach English.*

Keywords: *online teaching, modern technologies, universities, English as a foreign language, e-learning platforms*

Introduction

The traditional way of learning English at universities in Europe and the world in the last decade has increasingly moved towards so-called blended learning, where more and more technological innovations and modern tools have been included in practice, which have promoted electronic learning significantly. If a few years ago online presentations and remote presentation of newly achieved results were characteristic of scientific conferences or individual involvement with some promotional university centers, recently distance learning has become inevitable and proved a challenge during conditions of pandemic and limited physical communication (Toquero, 2020:14). The challenges brought about by the regional pandemic conditions forced researchers to make a review and a proposal for continuing the educational process with the possibility of studying the English language through distance, that is, online. The conducted investigations showed that the most suitable option for this type of education are the application of new technologies and a large number of platforms, the most applicable of which were Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, Cisco's Webex, and others (Fitria, 2020: 138). Learning English through an online system and the use of these platforms was not only a practically applicable process but was much more than. Teachers did not use the platforms only to transform the learning material but also as a testing tool for students, for evaluation of their direct communication and

¹ Lecturer at the Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia.

² Full professor at South East European University, Tetovo, North Macedonia.

ability to conquer a new way of technological progress (Andriivna et al., 2020: 4). In the online process of study and education, students received an additional modification for more directional communication between colleagues and professors and enrichment of their personalities caused by the opportunity to receive free information and education using modern tools and technological solutions (Kawinkoonlasate, 2020: 15).

In such new conditions, when higher education institutions were not ready technologically, educationally and equipped with modern tools to smoothly implement the educational process, the provision of new information through research studies in the most advanced European centers was inevitable.

Theoretical background

The background of the online teaching English as a foreign language during COVID-19 has its structural fundamentals within the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (Agustin et al., 2018: 69), as suggested in Venkatesh et al. (2003) and lately by Yunus et al. (2021: 58). UTAUT was integrated from eight models: Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action (TRA), the technology acceptance model (TAM), the motivational model (MM), the theory of planned behavior (TPB), TAM and TPB combined, the model of PC utilization (MPCU), the innovation diffusion theory (IDT), and the social cognitive theory (SCT). There are four behavioral intentions in UTAUT (Figure 1): effort expectancy (EE), performance expectancy (PE), social influence (SI), and facilitating conditions (FCs).

The emerging situation with the pandemic and its implications in higher education initiated numerous studies and research on this matter around the World. Some the first research of this kind was conducted in Britain (Crawford et al., 2020: 9), then in Sweden and Finland (Loima, 2020: 20), as well as in Georgia (Basilaia and Kvavadze, 2020). The conclusions were different in Great Britain, online learning was half-heartedly accepted and justified with the remark that it led to demotivation among students and disrupted the continuity of the numerous activities that students performed in mutual communications. Although – according to Loima, in Finland the process of online learning was fundamentally contested sociologically.

After a year of experience and the application of modern tools supported by social platforms, a successful and advanced implementation of online teaching achieved good results in the study of the English language and education in general. In Georgia, the Google Meet platform was a real discovery in online teaching, because more than a thousand students could join it and communicate two-way on the teacher-student, student-student, etc., including in that functionality, and modern phones became more formative communications and provision of fast and quality information in the educational sphere.

In contrast to these positive experiences from some European countries, online learning in Indonesia also showed certain weaknesses (Putra et al., 2020: 30), which pointed to the unpreparedness of certain higher education institutions in terms of providing quality internet, solid computers and auxiliary modern tools including smart phones and quality platforms as supporters of the online system for transforming knowledge. In Cyprus, for example, Souleles et al. (2020) emphasize that inadequate classrooms that were formed and equipped with information technology hastily, with the use of discounted internet and inadequate working conditions, can be taken as a negative connotation.

On the other hand, an information and online revolution was made in Norway with the use of the Zoom platform, which in the best possible way provided interactivity between students and professors. This enabled the building of intelligent competences and progressive technological inventiveness. The example of the recommendations of the Chinese higher education system is also interesting, which recommends to universities in Beijing more advanced virtual information steps that will be motivation and responsibility

among students for comprehensiveness in the application of new technologies and tools in the study of foreign languages and raising technological awareness to conquer fast online communications with colleagues in home universities and especially with those of passion (Bao, 2020: 15).

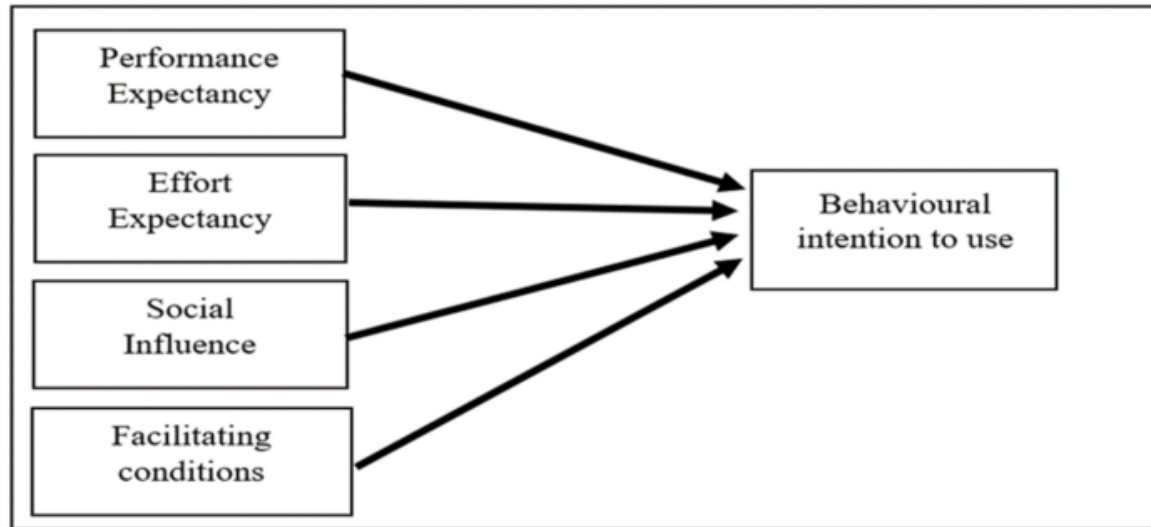


Figure 1. Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) Model in Teaching English as a foreign language

Published studies have confirmed the effectiveness of the UTAUT model in investigating students' acceptance and preparedness for e-learning, e-learning acceptance levels among accounting lecturers in the universities, factors that influence the intent of teachers in higher education to use e-learning in hybrid environments, and the evaluation of different on-line tools for learning during COVID-19 at a numerous universities (Anchalee Ngampornchai et al., 2016; Babie et al., 2020: 45; Mahande et al., 2019: 23; Maphosa et al., 2020: 84).

There are numerous factors and precise information that can be used as a guideline for the successful development of online learning. For example, at the University "Goce Delchev" in Shtip, Republic of North Macedonia, most of the faculties successfully conduct lectures, exams and mid-terms through the Microsoft Teams platform. The use of the electronic tools through which all students, and teaching and administrative staff of UGD are connected has been in place since the establishment of the university. These tools have been modernized and upgraded over time. Specifically, all user accounts from the local AD (students and all administrative and teaching staff) have been synchronized (more than 38,000 student accounts from all 3 study cycles and about 1,300 accounts for the teaching and administrative staff). Also, it should be noted that at that very same university, of all the services included in the Office 365 package before the onset of the coronavirus, Microsoft Exchange Server (mostly e-mail) was the most popular and accepted. However, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, the number of users of the Teams service on a daily basis has exceeded Exchange. UGD's statistics confirm that more than 1,000 Teams meeting sessions are held weekly. Most of them are online lectures, as well as teacher-faculty council meetings. Most of the professors organize exams through Teams while some of them use Microsoft Forms quizzes to conduct mid-terms also. The type of lectures varies a lot. There are lectures with only a few students (in some cases even one), but also lectures in which is reached the limit of 250 participants (UGD Life 2020, see source reference). We want to

emphasize that the other universities in the Republic of North Macedonia use different types of platforms, but with the same purpose, and successfully implement lectures, especially in teaching English as a foreign language. The University "Sts. Cyril and Methodius" prefers the Zoom platform. Google Meet is used at South East European University, while the Moodle platform is used at some other universities.

As we have already stated in the introduction, the experiences in the study of the English language at several universities in Europe and abroad are different when it comes to the application of online learning and the use of modern technological tools. The forced and rapid transition to online teaching, as was the case at the beginning of the pandemic on a global scale, led to numerous difficulties in the conduct of regular teaching. Insufficient equipment, discounted access to the internet, and lack of modern communication tools are just some of the disadvantages of e-learning for which students at several universities expressed reservations and cited that they miss learning with a physical presence and face-to-face with colleagues and teachers (Abbasi et al., 2020: 36). The results of the research conducted by Owusu-Fordjour et al. (2020: 80) go in a similar direction on a sample of over 200 students at the University of Ghana. The experiences obtained show that those students were unprepared to quickly join online learning, on the one hand, due to the insufficient technological equipment of the command classrooms and the small fund of modern tools available to students, and on the other hand, the insufficient continuous internet and the unwillingness of students to apply modern platforms for online communications and learning.

Unlike the above examples, the research conducted by Abbasi et al. (2020) on a sample of close to 80 students showed great inventiveness and readiness for online teaching which provided them with great benefits quick access to information, fast communications, time-saving, increased assistance between colleagues, frequent access to new materials, and quick transfer of knowledge.

It is interesting to mention the research carried out by Serafimovska and Trajanoska (2021), which refers to the mixed learning of the English language at universities in the Republic of North Macedonia and the experiences of professors in the use of modern technological tools in teaching. The obtained results show that over 80% of professors aged 25 to 45 actively support the process of mixed listening, and use of modern tools in lectures and interactivity with students. Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms were the most frequently used in online communication with students. Vocational English online learning was predestined or experientially most applicable among students in the higher education process (Heo and Han, 2018: 61) but the need for distance learning, especially during the conditions of a pandemic, when three years ago there was a complete stoppage of the educational system at all levels, the issue of implementing the educational process in the lower levels of education was also great. Of particular interest here are the studies conducted by Sintema (2020) in some schools in Zambia, which yielded encouraging data. In particular, there the students were recommended to use mobile phones, which they handled very quickly and efficiently, and the teachers very successfully transformed the teaching materials and recommendations for studying the planned curricula. Those positive experiences with phones later contributed to the practical use of tablets and the inclusion of part of professional platforms that put online learning into practice.

Research methodology

The research methodology was based on data collection and active participants. It included mainly teachers who conducted online education (including during the formal suspension of classes and simulation exercises) due to the pandemic. A sample is accepted for convenience. Although many courses may have changed to online instruction at the time

the teachers answered the questions, the study questionnaire asked about the design of the instructional activity in only, generally, one course (English). Related to our study was an analysis of various online learning platforms and systems (eg, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, Cisco's WebEx, Google Meet, Jitsi, JoinNet, LINE Chat, Zoom, and YouTube). Emphasis was given, as we said earlier, on the study of the teaching of English as a foreign language at the seven universities in North Macedonia, where a total of 30 teachers were surveyed, mostly from the Faculties of Philology. The research was conducted online through the professional Google Forms platform, and then the data was analyzed. In the analysis of the obtained data, a comparison was made with similar findings at universities in Montenegro (Svalina and Ivić, 2020: 45) and Indonesia (Putra et al., 2020: 30).

Our activities were directly related to a comparative analysis of the application of new technologies in the study of the English language on the example of several universities in our region and in the Far East. On compatible issues, surveys conducted in foreign universities and universities in Macedonia allowed similar comparability of the percentage representation of the practice of the availability and applicability of new technologies in the respective universities.

Results and discussion

The application of modern tools, that are preferred by the students, such as smart watches, tablets, smartphones, represent the future of modern English language learning (Yi and Yang, 2020). The modernization of the faculties and the readiness to implement online teaching with the application of modern tools and technologies are certainly challenges of the 21st century, without which all innovations, not only in the educational process but also the overall economic progress, which is not possible without quality conquest, cannot be followed. Of the modern approach to knowledge of the English language as the leading language in world communications. In that way the research was conducted and the results are presented below.

Four questions were addressed within our analysis and by several universities in Indonesia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. On the first question, „Does your institution or university support online learning?“ thirty professors were polled in the study at five universities in the Republic of North Macedonia (Figure 2).

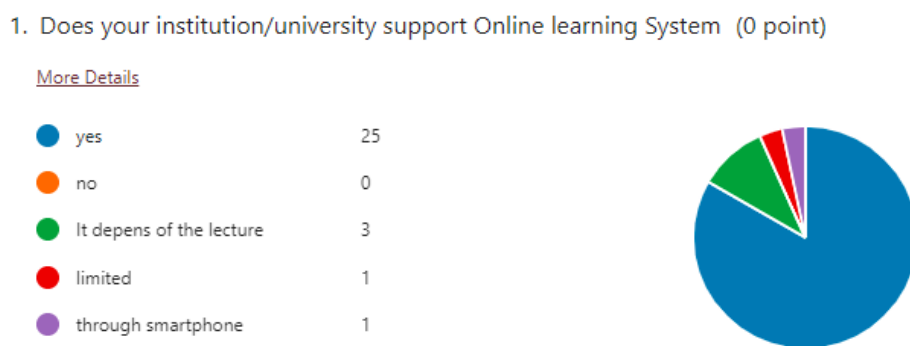


Figure 2 Illustration of the implementation in the Online Learning System at the Macedonian Universities

About 83% of the surveyed professors answered positively, about 10% gave a negative answer, and only 3% said that it depends on the class and the methodological unit that was planned (Figure 2). Very similar results were obtained from a survey conducted at

several universities in Indonesia. Namely, 81% of the respondents answered positively, 10% answered negatively, and only in 2-3 cases did each respondent say that they had limited support or that the system depended on the lecturer and the technique (Fitria, 2020). The results of the studies that were translated at three universities in the Republic of Montenegro are also similar. There, slightly over 70% of the respondents answered affirmatively, about 15%, mostly older professors, answered negatively, and the rest depended on the possession of appropriate equipment, the methodological unit, and the number of students (Camilleri and Camilleri) (Knežević, 2017).

In response to the second question, „Do you use an online learning system in your institution to teach English?“, the surveyed teachers at the universities in North Macedonia gave the following answer: sixteen respondents answered positively, or 53%, that online teaching of English is supported in their institutions; twelve respondents, or 40%, answered that they do it sometimes; and only two teachers, or 7%, answered negatively (Figure 3).

2. Do you use the online learning System in teaching English in your institution? (0 point)



Figure 3 Illustration of Online Learning System in ELT

These results show a positive approach by the teachers at the universities in North Macedonia; that is, the trend of online English language teaching is on the rise, but compared to the universities with which we performed the comparative analysis, it is still lower. To a similar question, colleagues from Indonesian universities responded positively, even with a little more than 90%, while only two of the 81 surveyed teachers responded negatively. Unlike them, at the universities in Montenegro, regarding the application of new technologies in the classroom, about 70% colleagues surveyed responded positively. These data show that in the region, the tendency to accept new technologies in the study of the English language is progressive, but it is still far from some of the most advanced world universities where English is taught as a second language. The importance of online technologies, their possibilities, and the wide range of progress in learning the English language through online systems are highlighted sometimes (Camilleri, 2021: 67).

For the third question, „What kind of online learning system do you usually use?“, the respondents from universities in North Macedonia showed the results as given below (Figure 4).

3. What kind of online learning System do you usually use? (0 point)

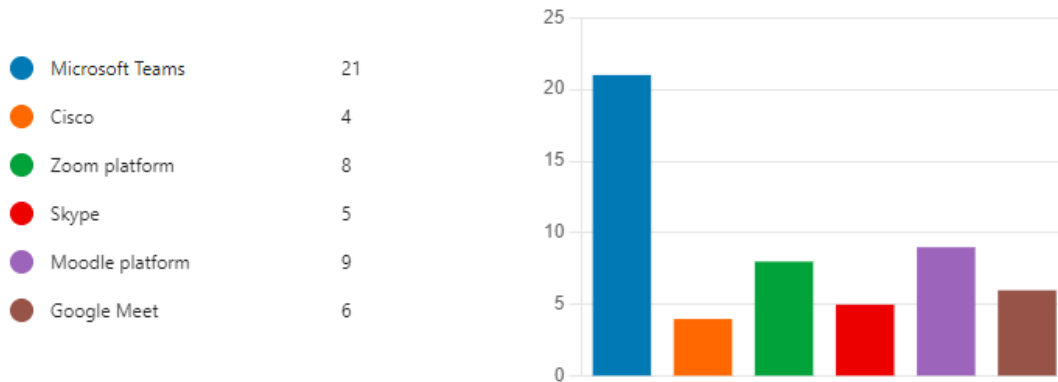
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Figure 4 Different types of online learning systems used at the universities in the Republic of North Macedonia

The most frequently used platform is Microsoft Teams, with 21% of positive responses, followed by Moodle with 9%, Zoom with 8%, Google Meet with 6%, Google Classroom with 6%, and the rest with less than 5%. Comparative data from respondents in Indonesian universities showed that 40% use Google Classroom. Around 7.5% use Zoom, 6.5% use Edmodo, 5% use Moodle, and the rest are under 3%. According to a comparison of data on platforms used in Montenegrin universities (Knežević, 2017), the most commonly used systems are Blood, Podcast, Moodle, and BlackBoard. These comparative data confirm the information that in other universities in the region and beyond, the most frequently used platforms are Google Meet, Moodle, Zoom, and, as it is practiced in the Far East, Google Classroom.

4. Do you give a task or quiz for your students in online learning System? (0 point)

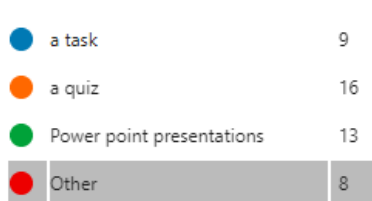
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Figure 5 Illustration of tasks given to the students

On the fourth question, "Do you give a task or quiz for your students in an online learning system?" the surveyed teachers from the universities in North Macedonia gave the following answers: 16 respondents, or 35% of the respondents, answered that they most often give students quizzes in class; 13 respondents, or 28%, answered that they let them

do power points; 9 respondents, or 20% of the respondents, answered that they were given tasks; and 8 respondents, or 17%, answered "other," in which the most common practice was video making, text analysis, story-telling, etc.

In the comparative analysis of the surveyed teachers from the universities in Montenegro (Svalina et al., 2020: 115) and Indonesia (Putra et al., 2020: 30), it can be noted that over 80% of the surveyed teachers answered that they give assignments or quizzes to the students in class. At the same time, they state that the format of the mentioned tasks is usually individually optional and that it refers most often to making essays, making videos, answering questions, writing texts, analyzing texts, and many other activities that contribute to the immediate development of their language learning.

Limitation of the study

Several limitations have impacted the research and the organization of the paper. First of all, part of the teachers at the universities in the Republic of North Macedonia were willing to participate in the survey. This directly affected the number of respondents and the possibility of having a more relevant sample of respondents for further analysis. Second, it was very difficult to find compatible results from similar research at universities in our area, in Europe, and around the world. Thirdly, the printed materials in the libraries in the country are limited, and it is difficult to find data from a more recent date, namely, on learning the English language with the application of new technologies.

Conclusion

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language with the application of new technologies has led to progress in many countries around the world. The application of new technologies and sophisticated educational platforms such as Zoom, Moodle, Google Meet, WhatsApp, Facebook, Blackboard and others has contributed to the affirmation and progress of learning English as a foreign language. The application of a modern way of learning English increased the creativity of teachers and the interest of students. The basic pillars as the main postulates for the online learning of the English language have gained even greater importance in the context of the pandemic. The findings enclosed within this paper show that over 97.5% of institutions support online learning of the English language, while only 2.5% of respondents do not, example of research in Indonesia (Fitria, 2020: 138). the percentage of universities in Macedonia that do is 83 % and they use online platforms. The most commonly used educational platforms in our country and in the world are Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Moodle and Google Meet. Through these platforms, professors use a modern approach to teaching, and students are given assignments, quizzes, and online work, and participate in presentations and other activities. This finding is in accordance with the results of our research at seven universities in the Republic of North Macedonia, in which the respondents declared that about 93% apply online learning to the study of the English language continuously or occasionally.

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