

## Ted Talks as a Digital Material in Foreign Language Teaching

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### Abstract

The paper considers the opportunity of practical use of TED Talks as a digital material in the process of foreign language teaching and learning in educational institutions of different types. It has been shown that TED Talks are quite a significant and powerful tool for developing students' speaking skills. The students improve their communication skills in a foreign language; definitely, it provides further professional opportunities for getting and sharing information, experience, ideas and views. The paper illustrates that the spheres of influence of TED Talks materials, which will be used in the educational process, can be conditionally divided into four groups such as socio-cultural dimension, competence dimension, language dimension and psychological dimension. It is emphasized that TED Talks can be multifunctional, satisfying almost any didactic request. However, the teacher should take into account the certain criteria for choosing a video watching. These criteria are: what video is about, the usefulness of the topic video; the appropriateness of the video to the academic environment and the length of the video. All of these criteria help to create the video to be successful and effective. If the teacher neglects these choosing criteria, the teacher will have a negative result after the video watching and during the discussion of this video among students. The paper also highlights that the use of TED Talks during foreign language teaching helps the teacher to solve a number of problems, in particular, to overcome the negative impact of interlanguage interference, and to increase students' motivation to learn a foreign language. Furthermore, it helps to make foreign language teaching more interesting and creative.

*Keywords:* TED Talks, English language teaching, communication, competences, skills, professional environment, students

### Introduction

There have been changes in modern society today. These changes have taken place in the socio-psychological, economic and other spheres of human life as well as education. After all, it encourages the search for new ways, means of

solving the problems of organizing the education process. Therefore, such digital technologies as Cloud Technology, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc. help education to become more accessible. Students can learn using digital tools anywhere and anytime. Moreover, they have the opportunity to gain knowledge, including a non-professional one. Using modern digital materials allows teachers to fully conduct teaching during online classes and makes it interesting at the same time. It encourages teachers to use modern digital tools both for online and offline education (Nezhyva, 2021). These materials make the education process mobile, interesting, individual and differentiated. At the same time, digital tools do not replace the teacher, but complement and expand his/her capabilities. In addition, during foreign language classes, it is necessary to use digital technologies which create educational material that is accessible, interesting and motivating for students.

One such digital material is TED Talks. According to the evidence of current leading professionals in English language teaching, TED Talks is one of the most promising digital materials today. According to Ahluwalia Gurleen & Deepti Gupta (2017), Tara Arntsen (2016), Mark Mallinde (2016), Adam Ramejkis (2012), it is now relevant to turn to TED Talks video, which is a resource for learning a modern foreign language. This is also followed in the article *Theory in Computer Assisted Language Learning Research and Practice* by Philip Hubbard and Michael Levy (2016), where they cover the theory of this issue in detail and consider it in the process of teaching foreign languages using ICT.

### The aim of the study

This study proposes the practical use of TED Talks as a digital material in the process of foreign language teaching and learning in educational institutions of different types. Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate the advantages and opportunities of using TED Talks presentations, and several ways of implementing TED Talks in the ELT classroom.

### Methodology

The methodological framework for the study of TED Talks as a digital material in foreign language teaching is based on a number of authentic English-language sources and the author's personal teaching experience. In particular, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches were used, it was possible to involve not only traditional but also new methods and principles in the analysis of using TED Talks presentations. Among the classical approaches to scientific knowledge the principles of consistency, integrity, objectivity, historicity and development were applied. Also general scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, abstraction, systematization are widely used in this

paper. During the academic semester, 20 TED Talks presentations were used in English classes to recreate a foreign language communication environment that promotes the development of language skills. The participants of this study were 46 first-year students, taught by the teacher, in four English classes at university in Ukraine. Of the 46 students, 16 were male and 30 were female. The students' average age was 18 years. At the beginning and end of the use of this method, all students were tested on the level of foreign language proficiency. The results of these tests, which were compared, were successful and became the basis of this study.

## Results

TED Talks (which stands for “Technology, Entertainment, and Design”) is a world-renowned conference which consists of short lectures. These lectures focus on the natural sciences, the arts, education, culture, business, global issues, and sustainable development – the broad subject areas which together shape our future. Here are some examples of lectures: *Wolpe: Bio-engineering by Paul Root*, *How to stay calm when you know you'll be stressed by Daniel Levitin*, *Every Kid Needs a Champion by Rita Pierson*. One speech is about 20 minutes and contains a relevant and original opinion topic. However, a successful speech is not just a worthy idea, but also the rich English language (Belmaz, 2019). This is an important factor for the improvement and development of foreign language skills, namely listening and speaking in the process of foreign language learning. After all, each lesson is based on a spoken text (TED Talk), which serves as a meaningful basis for all exercises during the class. In addition, properly chosen TED Talk materials and an organized concept help immerse students in a real communication situation that have to be practiced in order to properly use the foreign language (Hubbard & Levy, 2016). Furthermore, it activates lexical and grammatical material, stimulate conversational processes, and contribute to overcoming the language barrier, which often is in a real communication situation.

Also, in addition to developing new vocabulary, and grammatical and syntactic constructions, TED Talks promote the development of a number of different skills which are useful in an academic and professional environment (Noriko & Chi, 2004). Furthermore, the students learn to make speeches and prepare presentations by themselves, which helps them to feel free in the future when speaking at scientific seminars and conferences, etc.

Thus, we came to the conclusion that the spheres of influence of TED Talks materials, which will be used in the educational process, can be conventionally divided into four groups. They are:

1. The first group is *a socio-cultural dimension*. The topics are in the TED Talks videos relate to the most pressing problems of humanity such as interracial

and interethnic tolerance, social adaptation of people with special needs, the impact of the latest technologies on society, the role of women in modern society, etc. Moreover, obviously, watching such topics of public speaking will not only introduce students to socio-cultural trends, scientific discoveries, hypotheses and technological innovations, but will also help them to form their personal opinion about the presented information, their own vision of the causes and solutions to a particular problem (Reimer, 2002). The provocative nature of the speeches can encourage students to engage in an interested discussion about what they have heard. This discussion can be started even before watching the video and continued after one.

2. The second group is a *competence dimension*. If the teacher organizes watching TED Talks videos correctly, these videos will improve listening skills (direct watching of a recorded public-speaking presentation), reading (working on freely available full transcripts of each video speech published on the website), speaking (as part of an organized discussion on the topic of a speech with an emphasis on structural and lexical features of speech) and writing (which can be organized after the completion of the review and discussion of the problem).

However, TED Talks video develops the most important competences (Yu-jung & Hung-Tzu, 2015) such as:

- *presentation skills*. The ability to effectively prepare public-speaking presentation. This preparing consists of such stages as choice of topic, effective structuring of main ideas, and selection of techniques for successful verbal and non-verbal interaction with listeners and methods of maintaining a high level of sustained interest of the audience in the information provided by the speaker.
- *note-taking skills*. The ability to note down information, that is, to keep records that will be used for further tasks.

Presentation skills and note-taking skills will be useful to students in the academic environment (when preparing scientific papers and listening to lectures), in the professional environment (in the context of business negotiations and contact with clients, when participating in professional conferences, meetings, seminars as a speaker, as well as the listener ) and in everyday life (in the sphere of interpersonal communication and private interests, like noting the main ideas of an interesting book, etc.).

3. The third group is a *language dimension*. If the educator organizes watching TED Talks videos correctly, TED Talks conferences will contribute to a contextual vision of the lexical-grammatical component of the presentations, an understanding the meaning of words, grammatical structures and constructions function in the authentic speech, analysis of lexical and syntactic aspects (Nezhyva, 2017). In addition, we consider it appropriate to emphasize the presence of a large number of speeches made not by native English speakers, but by speakers

who use British English as a foreign language and quite often have a peculiar accent characteristic of their native language. Introducing students to TED Talks shed light on the diversity of foreign accents and will give an opportunity to hear how people speak from different countries. We distinguish that it is extremely useful for the students in their future because today's students will be more likely to conduct academic or professional communication not with native speakers, but with representatives of other countries and cultures (Azimova, 2019). Thus, working with TED Talks will allow them to get used to the distinctive sound of the same words and to appreciate the richness and potential of English as a language of international communication;

4. The fourth group is a *psychological dimension*. Emotional presentation of information in TED Talks conferences, curiosity and modernity of topics create a favorable learning atmosphere, which positively affects the motivation and desire of students to listen, analyze, and perform relevant tasks. In addition, TED Talks conferences are intended to show that the main goal of the project and the English language as a mediator of international communication is successful communication and expression of one's position, regardless of a foreign accent and limited vocabulary. Students' vision of speakers who are able to interest the audience without being native speakers removes the psychological barrier, teaches not to be afraid of making mistakes in pronouncing words (Reimer, 2002). Moreover, it helps to realize that the main goal of learning English is not the ability to speak absolutely flawlessly, but the ability to express oneself clearly for the interlocutor, the ability to achieve the necessary communicative goal (Nezhyva, 2020 b). Furthermore, the discussion of interesting and topical issues raised in the video is highly likely to cause a communicative reaction in students i.e. students will have a desire to agree or disagree with the following statements, which they heard, express their own opinions, provide counterarguments, etc. It is known that students often evade the answer, remain silent or answer in monosyllables, if the topic of the question is not interesting to them, not up-to-date, not relevant or they have nothing to say because they do not have enough information about the discussed problem. When a TED Talks video is successfully chosen for foreign language classes, as well as the correct construction of the process of working with it, it will inspire students to speak i.e. students start to make their own statements and exchange ideas.

Such a wide range of advantages and areas of influence of TED Talks presentations requires a balanced approach to the creation of educational tasks in order to fully realize the potential of these videos as educational material when teaching English to students of higher education institutions. Moreover, TED Talks videos can be used into the educational process as in and out of class. If a TED Talks video is offered for watching in the class, then it should traditionally be accompanied by quality worksheets with properly structured exercises.

Of course, the teacher can use English textbooks which consists of TED Talks videos e.g. textbooks by National Geographic Learning. Otherwise, the teacher creates his/her own classroom materials. Before watching TED Talks, it is advisable to organize a preliminary discussion of the relevant problem, which will be revealed in the prepared video. Moreover, the teacher should give students the word lists as well as terms and expressions which will be used in the video. This list is called *the concept-based vocabulary teaching*. This is a conceptual approach to the presentation of new lexical items, which promotes the development of critical thinking because it helps to understand the connections between different concepts (Azimova, 2019). While watching the video, which, by the way, can be divided into parts for a more detailed discussion of each piece of information, students can be asked to find answers to questions prepared in advance by the teacher, fill in the gaps in the text, take notes, etc. After watching the video, a discussion can be held in the form of a debate during which students will have to support or give arguments to disagree with the following statements, which they heard. Moreover, students can be asked to retell the video, or even repeat the speaker's speech using nonverbal communication and body language (Yu-jung & Hung-Tzu, 2015).

Moreover, students can receive tasks (both in the classroom and as part of independent work outside the classroom) to make a speech on a related topic or a topic of their own choice or write an essay. Another task is verbal and non-verbal communication explains in detail, i.e. analyzing the structure of the public speaking. This task can be useful for Masters and PhD students who are working on research papers and preparing presentations at international conferences.

An interesting approach to watching video is offered by Mark Mallinder (2016), who provides videos to his students to watch them outside the classroom every week. First, his students get acquainted with the full text of the speech (transcript), find out the meaning of new phrases and words. Then they listen to the speech, reading its text in parallel and paying attention to the accents in the words. Later, students listen to the speaker without having the text of the speech in front of them, observing the general intonation and accents. Finally, students are asked to reproduce this same speech by making an audio recording and sending it to the teacher. Moreover, following these steps, audio recordings of student speech are listened to and analyzed in the classroom, discussion of new words and phrases is organized, and discussion is held on meaningful topics raised by TED Talks speakers (Mallinder, 2016).

Another educator Alexandra Lowe (2013) offers students to independently choose videos to watch at home, and in classes organizes watching of short fragments of the most interesting videos which were liked by students. This approach to the organization of independent work is effective because during classes, students freely discuss what they are really interested in. Furthermore,

the students can also learn from others about exciting videos which they will want to watch in their spare time. This instills interest in learning English (Lowe, 2013).

According to the purpose of the lesson, TED Talks materials can be multifunctional, satisfying almost any didactic requests. However, working with the video will be successful and effective if the teacher should take into account the certain criteria for choosing a video watching (Arntsen, 2016). These criteria are:

- *The usefulness of the topic video.* Taking into account the fact that the topic of TED Talks presentations, as indicated above is impressive in its diversity, the teacher should conscientiously select videos, in according with the curriculum, the general topic of the current module and a specific lesson. Moreover, it should be appropriateness, expediency, usefulness and the interest of the problem revealed in the speech for students of a specific group.
- *The appropriateness of the video to the academic environment.* This criterion is very similar in nature to the previous one, but it concerns a more detailed study of the video by the teacher before demonstrating it to a group of students. Here, the teacher should check the choosing video for the presence of offensive, obscene language, jokes or stories that carry an overly provocative message or have a religious, political, or sexist character. Moreover, the teacher should pay not least attention to the person and image of the speaker, as well as the academic and socio-cultural readiness and interest of students in the chosen topic.
- *The level of language and pronunciation difficulty.* When the teacher chooses a recorded public-speaking presentation offered on the TED Talks website, he/she should analyze their lexical-grammatical, phonetic and stylistic features. For the reason that a chosen public-speaking presentation will should have the lexical and grammatical units, the construction of sentences, the style of presenting information, non-verbal communication, clarity of pronunciation which will correspond to the level of students' knowledge of the English language and will not hinder perception and understanding.
- *The length of a video.* TED Talks presentations usually vary between 5–20 minutes, so the teacher should clearly plan the lesson that the chosen length of video meets the requirements of the type of the lesson.

If the teacher neglects these selecting criteria, he/she will have a negative result after the video watching and during the discussion of this video among students. So, for example, students may lose interest in the public-speaking presentation due to insufficient understanding of the vocabulary or speaking too fast in a presentation. Furthermore, the incorrect time calculation led to a violation of the structure of the lesson and inferior work with the heard information.

Moreover, the choice of social sensitivity issues for which students are not prepared to discuss, or which touch on personal experiences of students, can cause indignation or even cause too heated discussion.

## Discussion

This paper had shown the rich potential of the TED Talks presentations as a quite significant and powerful tool for developing students' speaking skills. The potential direction of further scientific and methodological development of this topic is to conduct a practical experiment (with elements of surveys and observations of experimental and control groups) of implementing TED Talks materials in the English classes in higher education institutions of different types. It will allow to demonstrate the educational potential of this resource, as well as to find the most effective ways of incorporating it into the process of foreign language teaching.

## Conclusion

After the collected and analyzed the results of students' level of foreign language proficiency based on the used method, some conclusions can be drawn. These are touched on one by one below:

- TED Talks offers a large number of recorded public-speaking presentations which present the process of the foreign language learning as one of the most significant trend of the 21st century.
- TED Talks are a powerful tool for preparing students to communicate in an English-speaking professional and academic environment.
- The use of TED Talks during foreign language teaching helps the teacher to solve a number of problems, in particular, to overcome the negative impact of interlanguage interference, and to increase students' motivation to learn a foreign language.
- TED Talks helps to make foreign language teaching more interesting and creative.

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