



## **Social Networks as an Innovative Resource for Teaching Specialty English to Agricultural Universities Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article is devoted to the use of Internet technologies in teaching non-linguistic university students a foreign language. It has been shown that the use of the Internet space in the learning process has a number of positive aspects: social networks for students with different levels of language competence do not cause fear and rejection when using them; they raise motivation to learn a foreign language, expand vocabulary, improve knowledge of the grammar of the language studied. The article considers a number of features of work in the Internet space, analyzes the role of the teacher in organizing this type of work. The result of the work is the statement of necessity of using social virtual networks as an integral attribute of modern educational process.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, Internet space, social virtual networks, motivation boost, students of non-linguistic universities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The relevance of this research is determined by the need of modern universities to train specialists with sufficient knowledge of a foreign language to arrange foreign language communication in their specialty. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the fact that the use of modern technologies to improve the linguistic competence of students of agricultural universities has been considered. Thus, the objective of this research is to reveal the possibility and necessity of successful integration of social virtual networks into the educational process of agricultural universities when teaching students English. Proceeding from the set goal, the following tasks of the research have been defined: first, to prove the necessity of introduction of internet technologies into the educational process; second, to consider the peculiarities of work in the internet space; third, to conduct an experiment on application of Instagram social network in the process of students' education.

Currently, knowledge of a foreign language (in particular, English) plays a huge role in training specialists in various specialties. In a society where borders are open and the main language of international communication is English, the study of this language in an agricultural university should reach a new, higher level. The problem that teachers of English in non-linguistic specialties inevitably face is the lack of motivation of students and low level of school training in a foreign language. In this regard, teachers still need to ensure communicative competence as the leading linguistic goal of learning on the one hand, and on the other hand, to organize and conduct classes in language material accessible to this audience. [2]. Therefore, it is necessary to rely on the available personal experience of students, taking into account the specifics of the chosen direction, to carry out important language activities in foreign language lessons: speaking, reading and writing, gradually expanding the knowledge of vocabulary on professional topics. [1, p.11].

The 21st century has opened up new opportunities for young people to communicate in an English-speaking environment created through the Internet, where learners engage in real communication with native speakers on topics and problems of their main specialty. Engaged in a wide range of meaningful, realistic, interesting tasks, students must respond spontaneously and adequately to them, creating original statements and using patterns. The virtual environment of the Internet allows to go beyond time and space limits, giving its users the possibility of authentic communication with real interlocutors on the topics actual for both sides. [7] Thus, teachers strive to unite all the required educational technologies in the classroom, paying special attention to communicative and learner-centered competence in English lessons in educational institutions. [1, p.15-18].

## DISCUSSION & RESULTS

In English lessons, you can use the Internet to solve a number of didactic tasks: to develop reading skills and abilities using materials from the global network; to improve the written skills of students; to increase the vocabulary of students, thus forming a sustainable motivation to learn English. Students can take part in tests, quizzes, contests, online Olympiads, correspond with their peers from other countries, and participate in video conferences.

When studying listening, the students listen to foreign language speech. In speaking training, the learners pronounce phrases in English into a microphone and then listen to themselves "from outside". They also assess their speech and compare their pronunciation with that of the speaker. When learning to write, the learners do crossword puzzles, test and game exercises.

For teaching English, which is considered an international language, Internet resources provide an endless opportunity to use a variety of information and resources such as:

- - e-mail;
- - teleconferences;
- - videoconferences;
- - access to information resources;
- - ability to publish own information in a foreign language;
- - authentic reference books, dictionaries, study packs, etc. [4].

When organizing the work of students of agricultural universities E. V. Barysheva offers the following practice of organizing and systematizing language material:

Stage 1 of interaction - the teacher is a transmitter of the language through teaching reading, making up vocabulary, showing authentic or close to authentic texts for reading and reflection.

Stage 2 - active involvement of students under the guidance of a foreign language teacher through a series of tasks aimed at comprehending grammatical, lexical, phonetic and country studies material, through the audiovisual method of teaching in the lessons, in particular, including independent work.

Stage 3 of language acquisition is connected with an attempt to model speech dialogues based on learning language clichés not only through reproductive student activities, but also through the creation of presentations, participation in mini discussions, student conferences, direct communication with students, teachers and volunteers from countries of the language studied and online and through other forms, which allows to attract students to language communication and popularize the role of language for students in general. [2]

One form of virtual network space based on modern information and communication technologies is virtual social networks. Virtual social network is an interactive multiuser site, the content of which is filled by its visitors, with the ability to specify any information about an individual person, by which the user's account (page) can be found by other members of the network. Virtual social networks as an attribute of the information society create a special communicative space, communication in which has its own features and differs from communication in the physical reality. [6].

Social media continue to gain in popularity and have already been the focus of attention of researchers such as J. Barnes, R. Solomonoff, P. Herdos, A. Rennie, D. Watts and S. Strogach. Social networking is a powerful tool that allows users to communicate with each other. Recently, social networks have become a part of young people's lives where they post photos, communicate, visit the pages of acquaintances and strangers, and write messages to them. The most famous social networks are MySpace and Facebook. One type of social networks is language social networks, which allow learning a foreign language on your own. In turn, linguistic social networks can be classified by specialization, availability of information and geographic location [6, p. 62].

The task of the teacher is to competently organize independent work of students. At the beginning of the work, students are offered a list of websites that can help them to solve their task, for example, Interpals. The tasks can be varied and will depend on the language level, age and topic being studied. At elementary level, students are assigned the task of determining the profession of the person in question from their photographs, and later confirm their guess when communicating with them in person. At a more advanced level, students are asked to interview several peers and get their views on film/painting/education issues. This task forces the student to use the vocabulary and grammar they have learned in a written statement. In addition, students learn the rules of communication, the phrases of politeness, the logic of building a statement.

Currently, the Instagram social network has become very popular among young people. There is a huge number of photos that can be used by a teacher to work at a lesson, as well as to organize independent work of students to practice grammar writing skills. When working on Past Simple, students are encouraged to look at a friend's photos, find out what he was doing yesterday, and ask him questions based on the photos. To practice Present Perfect, students can upload their photos and sign them, indicating what they just did.

Besides, it is reasonable to use Instagram while working on the vocabulary. For example, students are invited to find a friend who gets the same or similar specialization in a foreign university in any English-speaking country and write him a message asking questions on the proposed topic. Depending on the specialty that the students are obtaining, the teacher selects language topics that broaden the cross-cultural understanding and enrich the

linguistic aspects in the chosen direction, for example for technical specialties such as Agricultural Engineering, it is possible to offer a number of projects - "Diesel engines and their production in different countries", "Production of agricultural machinery in Russia and abroad", "Robotics and its application in modern agriculture", etc.

As an experiment we have created a page in Instagram for students of Agricultural Engineering department [https://www.instagram.com/elcentre\\_pgsha/](https://www.instagram.com/elcentre_pgsha/). In order to organize successful work of students on this web page the teacher was following the following plan:

1. Discussion of the page interface with students at the class.
2. Selecting the initiative group to create a page.
3. Discussion about page content.
4. Making a list of topics to be covered in the Internet space.
5. Creating rules for using the account.
6. Attracting outside English-speaking participants with knowledge of students' specialization.

The process of creating and completing the page has aroused great interest among students. On this page, they performed grammatical tests for the difference between Past Simple and Present Perfect tenses. The convenience of using the tests in Instagram is expressed by the fact that the student immediately sees the result, whether the answer is correct or not, moreover, it is possible to pass the test again and correct mistakes. This format of repeating the material studied in the class is much more attractive and effective for students. As the experiment showed, the level of grammar skills and the volume of vocabulary used increased due to the need to express their thoughts on a given topic independently, in a familiar format, which is hardly associated with educational routine. The work on this page was perceived by students as more of an entertainment, rather than a daily work in the class. The teacher's goal of motivating students was achieved.

By the end of the academic year, the following results were achieved:

1. 93% of English language students were enrolled. (In addition, interest in the social media page was shown by senior students who had already completed a foreign language course.)
2. The number of visits to the profile is between 50 and 150 users per month.
3. All English language students took part in maintaining the page, i.e. publishing life stories, news from the University and stories about themselves and about the topics offered by the teacher.
4. Vocabulary, grammar and communication skills were significantly improved.

The clearness and habitualness of the ideology and interface of social networks for most students saves time by bypassing the stage of students' adaptation to a new communicative space, which allows to build informal communication between Russian and English-speaking students and helps to organize practice-oriented learning. The high level of interaction between teacher and student ensures the continuity of the learning process beyond the classroom. The use of forum and wiki technologies in virtual learning groups allows all participants to create online learning content independently or jointly, which stimulates independent cognitive activity, as well as creative activity. [7, p. 62]. The multimedia nature of the Internet allows students to use their personal talents and achievements in preparing and downloading video and audio materials, interactive applications.

**Conclusion.** Thus, to increase the motivation of students of agricultural universities to study English, it is expedient to use modern Internet resources, and in particular, social virtual networks, as the most familiar and understandable resource for learning English on a university specialty. At the present stage, educational literature, reading halls and libraries are inevitably being replaced by the Internet space. The role and responsibility of the teacher grows, since in his competence is the development and selection of multilevel tasks, taking into account the specialization of students, constant improvement of its own methodological and teaching level, updating of educational material in accordance with the achievements of science and technology of the modern world.

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