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TEACHING ENGLISH WITH POWERPOINT

Abstract: The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has become ubiquitous in modern education. PowerPoint (PP) is a popular presentation software which can be successfully exploited in foreign language teaching settings, however, its effectiveness depends on the teacher's resourcefulness. This paper highlights the benefits and limitations of applying PP to design an ESL/EAP lesson and presents practical examples of implementing the slideware to facilitate the teaching/learning process.

Keywords: PowerPoint, ESL/EAP lessons, methods of teaching

WYKORZYSTANIE PROGRAMU POWERPOINT W NAUCZANIU JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO

Streszczenie: Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-komunikacyjnych (ICT) stało się wszechobecne we współczesnej edukacji. PowerPoint (PP) jest popularnym programem do tworzenia prezentacji multimedialnych, który z powodzeniem można wykorzystać w nauczaniu języków obcych, jednak jego skuteczność zależy od pomysłowości nauczyciela. Celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie korzyści i ograniczeń oprogramowania PP do przygotowania lekcji językowych oraz pokazanie praktycznych przykładów jego zastosowania w celu usprawnienia procesu nauczania/uczenia się.

Słowa kluczowe: prezentacje PowerPoint, lektorat / lekcja nauki języka obcego, metody nauczania

Introduction

As ICT has become an integral part of today's teaching-learning process, especially in post-pandemic reality (Saif et al., 2022), the use of PowerPoint (PP) seems to be a valid addition to multimedia class design. Undoubtedly, ICT enriches existing ESL/EAP instruction and provides many opportunities for teachers and students to exploit it extensively in order to improve the quality of classroom work in a globalised digital age (Oliver, 2019). Remote teaching has also

demonstrated the potential of ICT as a means for granting greater flexibility and interactivity, motivating students, and finally, achieving learning and teaching objectives effectively (Oliver, 2015; Wagner, 2017: 24–26). It must be remembered, however, that successful educational use of ICT depends on how and where it is exploited, and for what purposes. So as to accommodate to the needs of modern digital generation, universities should implement new technologies adequately to their growing demand (Oliver, 2019; Kölin, Johansson, 2022).

Benefits of using PP slides

According to some researchers, lessons aided by PP benefit students' cognitive learning (Baker, Goodboy, Bowman, Wright, 2018), and others assert that full understanding is gained when information is presented in both text and visuals rather than in an isolated medium (Kölin, Johansson, 2022). The versatility and flexibility of PP in teaching various aspects of language has also been proved useful (Fisher, 2003), and for this reason adopting the software as a pedagogical tool to prepare class materials has become a regular routine for me.

How much you apply slideware to lessons will obviously differ based on your individual teaching style. Incorporating it into daily instruction may visibly facilitate it, can help to engage and interact with your students, the classes become more diversified and structured, and have a smooth flow.

Since “Power point is entirely presenter-oriented, and not content-oriented, not audience-oriented” (Marcovitz, 2004: 4), having this in mind, it is important to apply PP wisely to student-centred settings. The use of PP in ESL/ EAP lessons requires careful, meaningful planning, the process is time-consuming, the materials must be learner-oriented and aid the learning process, they cannot take the prevailing role of instruction. The pushy mode of PP must be harnessed to achieve lesson aims and engage students.

Another issue with PP is that projected slides are by nature very low resolution, “promote the use of compressed phrases”, and consequently the “impoverished space (of slides) leads to over-generalisations (Tufte, 2003: 4), which in case of language teaching can easily be overcome if, for example, printed materials are used and come timely with relevant slides. Sometimes the reduced information projected on the wall serves an advantage as it:

- hints at an exercise that follows or an answer to a question;
- functions as a natural transition between activities or lead-in to what is to be done subsequently;
- creates a practical knowledge gap, making students think, collaborate and guess solutions to a problem;
- acts as a stimulus for elaboration, explanation and discussion.

How I use PP in class

For all these reasons the slides I prepare provide visual support, they act as a background, they do not show all the class material but augment the aspects of language I am teaching. Students have either printed or digital handouts, which are not a replica of the actual PP. In addition, there is no special need to write a lot on the whiteboard, which saves the time, therefore I am able to incorporate more activities and maintain a dynamic pace of lessons. My PP slides often emphasize the use of language, but do not present information about the language.

An engaging PP lesson involves generating interest in the topic as well as different activities it includes, and this can be achieved by the ingeniousness of a teacher combined with the features the software offers. Furthermore, PP slides represent a scaffolding around which a class is built and reveal its stages as the lesson progresses. Once students are guided, know where to go, what has already been covered, which point they are at, the problem of getting lost becomes a groundless concern. Appropriate slide sequencing keeps learners focused on activities and connected with lesson content. It becomes especially applicable to those with a short attention span and the contemporary generation as a whole, who frequently get distracted by all the digital media and technologies that surround them.

PP presentation is also a good set-up for activities which helps to make them look simple but interesting, meaningful and easy to do. It is especially useful in case of more complex longer activities, yet it cannot decrease student-instructor rapport and limit the opportunity for interactions between the teacher and student. Visual instruction staging or groupings illustrated on slides help to make instructions clear, optimize preparedness time and limit the amount of information students have to remember since the prompts are written on the slide, students can refer back to them easily while they complete an exercise. Consequently, the learning time is maximized, and student interaction and collaboration are fostered.

For example, as a preparation for report reading (RR) of a scientific article, I display slide 1 and elicit from students the rules of the game Chinese whispers. Next, I explain the rules of the task RR, nominate students A, B, C and D and show slide 2 to visualize the initial stage of the activity. After allocated time, the learners are requested to change partners and report the information heard from previous partners, which is illustrated in slide 3. Finally, students are paired as in slide 4 in order to verify information passed by former partners.

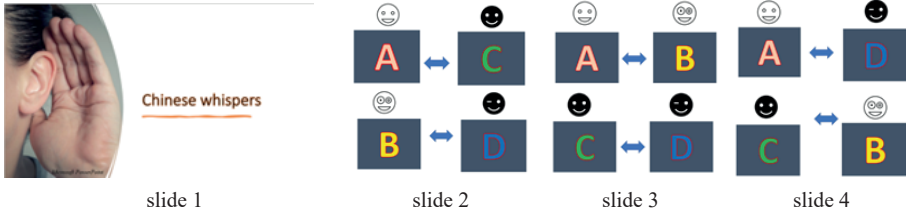


Figure 1. Stages of Report Reding activity
Source: PowerPoint.

I also use PP to project a discussion prompt or follow-up questions to the class, show images and text to contextualize some information, or to play audio and video materials, which work efficiently when being used adjacent to other materials student use at the same moment. Moreover, if video/ audio materials are embedded in slides, I do not need to search them on other devices, thereby I save time and energy.

Potential problems

In spite of so many benefits PP brings to the teaching–learning environment, there are also voices against it, pointing to certain drawbacks and pitfalls of its application in class. Some opponents argue that PP makes students passively engaged, and that it neglects interactions between learners and teachers, or that due to being stuck to a strict order of slides, it limits digression (Isseks, 2011: 74–75; Wagner, 2017: 22). These negative aspects, as I noted before, can easily be avoided by, for instance, making presentations more interactive and problem-solving oriented.

Conclusion

Wise use of technology can motivate students and make classes more engaging, more dynamic and interesting. It must be remembered, however, that the quality and relevance of multimedia activities are not to be ignored for the integrity of the content and lesson aims. “When used in a creative and non-routine way, PowerPoint can provide a learning and teaching experience in line with the visual sensitivities and skills of our times” (Wagner, 2017: 26). PP cannot impose and dominate itself on students, but should create impactful learning environment guiding them discreetly to become reflective multimedia users and preparing next generation for future lives and careers.

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