GLOBAL AND INNOVATIVE TOOLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: STRENGTHS OR THREATS?

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Abstract. *The article aims to reveal and present the essence of English language learning/teaching modernization via the innovative and globally used methods or tools. Innovations cannot be created and used without the existence of the traditional methodology and conventional activities. Positive experience in traditional education can be modified integrating global ideas. There are many alternatives in innovative tools usage; teachers and students are not limited with their own decisions and possibilities provided. Still, an important issue exists regarding positive and negative effects of such innovative and global tools on learners. Do participants of the study process demonstrate clear perception of possible benefits or reject such innovations due to their disadvantages? The survey reveals the current situation, where innovative tools do not exist independently. The usage of computer games, songs, films, social media (social networks, Youtube, the Internet) is not clearly separated from the traditional tools as books, friends, travelling or meeting foreigners. An in-depth overview gives basis for further studies on the application of more innovative tools, such as interactive activities on the Internet, interactive boards/tables, blogs, forums, virtual learning environments, strategies proposed by the scientists as neuroprogramming, language coaching, etc.*
Keywords: *English language, innovative learning/teaching, innovative tools/methods.*

Introduction

In 2012 The European Commission presented a new Rethinking Education Strategy where new competences important for the students as future employees were emphasized. Constantly changing society and labour market create challenges for the students at higher education institutions. They have to be ready to cope with unforeseen and unpredicted situations where newly acquired skills are important and fundamental. Pursuing current goals established by the education system, the skills of communication and communication in any foreign language cannot be denied. Due to the strengthening of internationalization of education and in order to achieve higher learning outcomes, it is suggested to apply modern / innovative methods and tools in the

study process. In accordance with various authors and scholars (Nunan, 2013; Richards & Rodgers 2014; Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005), a successful differentiation of traditional and innovative learning strategies ensures sufficient development of skills and proficiency in various subjects. The European Council presented Conclusions regarding Collaboration in Education and Science (ET 2020), where one strategic objective is devoted to the improvement of quality and efficiency of education and teaching through an application of innovative technologies. Higher Education Language Strategy (2013 – 2022) of Foreign Language Studies highlights the development of language learning/teaching process. English language competence has to be acquired, and it provides a competitive advantage in the modern society and labour market. Higher education institutions have to be "open", demonstrate innovative ideas and implement those involving students, members of the academic community and business representatives. Nowadays, the education system is in search of globally acknowledged and effective learning/teaching methods and tools, which could help students to develop a wide range of competences. New methodologies and learning/teaching tools oriented to provision of profound knowledge are being created by scientists and teachers-practitioners. Leonavičienė (2013) emphasizes that proficiency in a foreign language enhances self-confidence of language users and creates feelings of universality and versatility. English language learning should be organized consistently with the global situation in the world and labour market; balance between theory and practice has to be maintained. How to make this process unique, attractive and useful in the modern world with the 'digital generation' involved? Pedagogues and professionals are not limited to methodological materials and innovative tools. Besides that, traditional learning/teaching methods exist and are still applied in the study process. The key aim of pedagogues is to ensure provision of knowledge via technologies popular among the youth and appropriate preparation for the future professional activities. **Problem** may occur discussing and revealing strengths and/or threats of the global and innovative tools integration into English language studies. **Object:** Strengths and threats of the global and innovative tools applied into English language learning.

Aim: to analyze and specify strengths and (im)possible threats of the use of innovative tools/methods in English language learning.

Goals:
− to review the practice of traditional and innovative tools application into English language learning.
− to discuss strengths and possible threats of global/innovative tools application.

- to analyze students' practice of global and innovative tools application into English language learning at the universities in Klaipeda, Lithuania and Zielona Góra, Poland.

Methods: content analysis, survey, comparative analysis.

Innovations in educational tools

Globally used innovative educational tools make the learning/teaching process more efficient and, without exception, students are responsible for the management of their own pace of learning and determining objectives. It is scientifically ascertained that students' self-motivation is higher when they use new technologies; a process of searching 'e-space' makes studying more student-oriented and engaging, the progress and learning outcomes are observed to be obviously higher. Herein certain innovative and globally used tools for the English language learning, which are emphasized due to their novelty and orientation to a student and his/her learning progress, are emphasized by Žegunienė (2012, 2013, 2014) and other scholars.

Interactive board is a smart board connected to the computer and multimedia device. It may replace a traditional black board and chalk, TV set and even personal computers. *Audio, video and multimedia devices*. Teaching material can be reorganized and presented differently. The learning process may vary depending on the topic chosen for the lesson. Students are able to deepen their knowledge watching videos depicting real-life situations, listening to conversations with a natural noise and various English accents. *Multimedia devices* are used for entertainment, team work and the presentations of projects. *The Internet* and its educational websites provide an unlimited selection of games, apps, songs and other activities. In addition, students are able to improve their writing working with online diaries or chatting with friends. Vocabulary is developed using *online dictionaries* with real pronunciation of newly-learnt words. Teachers can search for innovations to be applied into efficient foreign language skills development in the special educational *forums* or *platforms*. Currently a new trend '*language coaching*' appeared where the main emphasis is on the combination of brain sciences and coaching, thus leading to a newly invented learning style '*tailored training*' (http://www.efficientlanguage coaching.com/). *Laboratories* with the latest learning programmes are equipped and used by teachers in educational institutions. For instance, *Sanako Lab* is equipped with an advanced teaching/learning programme that makes the learning process student-oriented and provides more possibilities to study independently and in a modernized way. *Educational websites* and *forums* present educational material for any subject and advise teachers on the study process improvement. In this way, teachers' positive teaching and lesson

planning experience is exchanged internationally. *Virtual learning environments* as WebCT or Moodle allow students to work independently and distantly, therefore the communication and collaboration between a student and a teacher are guaranteed. *Smartphones* are widely used in the whole world especially by young people. Suggested *apps* and *online dictionaries* may be used to check information or to find new words and their definitions.

Generalizing, the familiarization with advanced educational technologies and their integration into the content of traditional English language learning/teaching methods and the modernization of the study process are obvious. The language teachers have to develop their own professional and pedagogical capabilities in order to use technologies and modern devices in the teaching process. Proper motivation of students and the establishment of certain conditions for modernized learning may be beneficial in various educational aspects. Students can feel self-confident in choosing their personal learning style, creating autonomy, and adapting the study process to their own requirements and needs. Furthermore, collaboration between students and teachers could be organized in a more efficient manner; provided knowledge is updated, original and related to the real-world situations.

Strengths of the global and innovative educational tools

Easy access to modern portable devices such as laptops and smartphones with an Internet connection has its impact on language teaching and learning. As with each novelty, modern technology use can be a challenge, but also a new opportunity.

Their main advantage is the fact that the use of tools such as online dictionaries, or the Internet in general, offers an immense and immediate access to original materials, most of which free, which is a great asset and an important step forward when compared to the past. Nowadays, it is possible to communicate with people from all over the world without going out; reading original articles and books or watching films and videos in the original version has never been so easy. It all means that students learning foreign languages can have a much more intense contact with a given foreign language than just a few hours per week spent in the language classroom. This is true especially in the case of English, main language of international communication.

A questionnaire-based study (Kapica-Curzytek, Karczewska, & Sharp, 2017, in press) proves that students use English in online international communication. The Internet is where they look for information, where they spend their free time and make friends using social media. As a result, their exposure to the English language is much longer, which enhances the learning process and turns students into independent learners who can choose additional

materials of their interest to work with. It should be remembered that we are life-long learners who need to develop their competences also outside educational institutions and using the Internet makes us acquire that habit. In addition, when coping with the language outside school, students get used to using that language in real contexts and can appreciate how useful speaking a foreign language can be. Another advantage is the fact that they have access to original pronunciation with its various accents, which is often difficult to guarantee in schools with mostly non-native speakers teaching foreign languages.

Last few years have brought another tool. Nowadays, with constant Internet connection in their phones, students have access to all the online resources. What seems to be particularly useful in the language classroom is an access to online dictionaries and translation tools. As a previous study (Karczewska & Sharp, 2018, in preparation) shows, students do use online dictionaries and most of them do that during classes, especially at university. As the study shows, students do appreciate online dictionaries as they are quick and easy to use; moreover, online dictionaries provide a learner with more meanings, definitions, examples, pronunciation patterns and other useful information. When a given item is found, a learner may use other online dictionaries to check if it is appropriate or type it in a search engine to make sure that a given item is indeed used. What is very important, students learn to verify information they have found which is a crucial ability in life. It has to be made clear that in numerous classrooms there are no traditional dictionaries available, which means that it is necessary for students to use online dictionaries if they are to expand their vocabulary, in particular during writing and speaking classes. This in turn is a chance for the teacher to teach students how they should use online dictionaries and translation applications. Some teachers and students also believe that a word that is looked up by a student him- or herself will be remembered better than a word whose meaning is explained by the teacher. Therefore, students should be encouraged to be independent users of dictionaries. What the teacher should make his/her students aware of is the fact that looking for a foreign word is indeed a complex process which requires a lot of attention and a sort of detachment from what dictionaries show. Therefore, once students need to find a foreign word, they should be instructed to first find possible options in a bilingual dictionary and then check the meaning of the word chosen in a monolingual dictionary, to make sure that they are about to choose the right word. Speaking about new technologies, it would be also advisable to look for examples of real usage of a given word, to see if it is used in a particular context and how it is used. In addition, students should be instructed how to make use of all the functions dictionaries, both paper and electronic ones, offer. This means checking the word's pronunciation and spelling patterns, familiarizing with all

grammar information available, such as the plural form, countability/ uncountability in the case of nouns or past tense and past participle form in the case of verbs as well as analyzing the examples provided to see how the word is used in context. This is the teacher's role to discuss all these issues with his/her students and show them how to use a dictionary in an effective way. In the case in which students encounter an unknown foreign word, the procedure is quite similar: they should pay attention to its spelling and pronunciation, and then check its meaning and see how the word is to be used correctly. When students learn how to follow this pattern properly, they do not need to ask their teacher to provide them with all the details, they are able to find what they need on their own. As a result, they are able to look for necessary information also outside the teaching context, as this is what they learn a foreign language for: to be able to use it in real situations, not in the classroom. This means independence in language use.

Unfortunately, as the previous study (Karczewska & Sharp) shows, students prefer bilingual to monolingual dictionaries: 57 out of 102 students questioned used bilingual dictionaries only, and the subjects were all English philology students at university who are expected to be at least intermediate speakers of English when they start their studies. Only thirty respondents used both types of dictionaries, which may mean that they follow the pattern described above, i.e. they first find a foreign word in a bilingual dictionary to later check it again in a monolingual dictionary. All the others just rely on bilingual dictionaries. As the study also shows, the most popular online resource is Google translate which only offers a direct translation of a given word, with no information on how to use a given word properly. This means that students are mainly interested in getting a quick solution without paying particular attention to all the details of the word's correct use. This tendency can be related to the general trend of a fast pace of life where there is little time for consideration. Also teaching practice proves that students often choose the first word suggested by a dictionary, without doing any critical choice in the matter. Obviously, these are general observations which do not apply to every single student, but they do represent a general situation. This means that, as we cannot neglect translation applications and online dictionaries, teachers should show their students how to use these tools in a more reasonable way.

Apart from online dictionaries, the Internet offers a vast array of other tools a foreign language learner can use. All websites with foreign films, music and articles are valuable as they teach both a given language and the culture of the country in which it is spoken. Words used by a favorite singer are easier to remember as one learns them while being relaxed and with music in the background, which seems to enhance the learning process. Not to mention the

fact that favorite songs are listened to many times and therefore one's exposure to new vocabulary is longer while learning lyrics by heart is a valuable way to expand one's vocabulary. Students can also develop the habit of reading foreign newspapers or watching news online in order to broaden their vocabulary. Even if online communication through social media seems to be the most frequent online activity, some students do mention reading online articles and they do observe the manifestation of English as a global language mostly in pop culture, films and music, which means they are receivers of English-language culture (Kapica-Curzytek, Karczewska, & Sharp, 2017).

All the above remarks show how powerful these innovative tools are. As they are an important part of today's world, they cannot be neglected in the field of foreign language teaching and learning.

(Im)possible threats in global and innovative English language learning/teaching

Regardless of all the advantages of new technologies, one may observe that there are also some possible threats. As stated above, dictionaries in general and online ones in particular require an appropriate use. Students should be therefore instructed how to choose the correct term in the other language as there might be either no equivalent or more than one equivalent to choose. What is more, some translation applications may provide erroneous, mechanic translation that students should beware of. As already explained, students should be instructed how to make careful choices based on critical thinking instead of picking the first option available.

The major problem may be the use of modern devices in the classroom as students may tend to use their smartphones in various ways, not necessarily the one in which the teacher would like them to, e.g. playing games or reading posts on Facebook. There are indeed teachers who do not allow their students to use mobile phones in class at all and also some students do perceive using mobile phones in the classroom as a lack of respect for the teacher. As the previous study shows (see: Karczewska & Sharp), 60 % of university students were not allowed to use online dictionaries in the classroom when they are at school while at university 25 % of the respondents claimed not to be allowed to use them during classes. The results got confirmed in the survey conducted among teachers as some 78 % of them did allow their students to use online dictionaries in the classroom while 22 % did not. Those teachers explained that their ban on mobile phone use was either related to school rules or to the fear that students would use their devices in an inappropriate way. For other teachers using mobile phones was disruptive for the flow of the lesson and students seemed to lose interest in the topic. When students were asked to explain why their teachers

may not like them to use online dictionaries in the classroom, most of those who gave a reason (38 students) mentioned the fear that students would use their devices inappropriately.

Another problem is the fact that in order to appreciate modern tools, teachers have to know and use them themselves. According to Krajka (2012: 98), teachers are afraid to use computers in the classroom when they are not confident about their own skills in computer use. In addition to that, teachers are afraid to lose "the omnipotent and omniscient position" they would like to have. As a result, teachers' attitude has to change first as this is the main barrier in incorporating online tools into the classroom.

The next problem is technical in nature: still many universities do not provide fully-equipped lecture rooms, which means that teachers need to bring their own computers or tablets if they want to have access to the Internet and use it during classes. Therefore, some of them prefer more traditional solutions, i. e. a course book and CDs.

As far as the online use of English is concerned, it has to be remembered that nowadays most communication in English takes place between its non-native speakers; according to Nerrière and Hon (2009: 4) communication in English between its native speakers only represents merely 4 % of all the communication taking place in English. In all the other cases at least one party is a non-native speaker of English, with as much as 74 % of communication taking place between non-native speakers of the language only. Such estimates were confirmed in the previous study (Kapica-Curzytek, Karczewska, & Sharp, 2017, in press), where it turned out that students use English online mainly with other non-native speakers of English, people coming from different countries such as Germany or France, but also Saudi Arabia or Mexico. Therefore, English is a lingua franca for people of different origin who may present different levels of proficiency in it. That in mind, one should be particularly careful when learning from other non-native speakers of English, as errors due to interference with their mother tongue may occur. Unfortunately, that may apply to teachers as well. At the same time, not being exposed to native pronunciation, one does not have a chance to hear it, learn it and practice it. In addition, when speaking to non-native speakers of English, one is less likely to learn new vocabulary that is too advanced for most foreigners. All that said, students should be encouraged to seek opportunities to practice English with its native speakers, especially if we mean here university students majoring in English who want to become teachers or translators of English in the future, so they are expected to be excellent speakers of the language.

To sum up, it cannot be denied that English is a global language and the Internet even strengthened its position enabling an easier and more frequent international communication (Crystal, 2010: ix). At the same time the Internet revolutionized modern communication, enabling contacts with people from all over the world without even going out. As these changes cannot be reversed, modern school should also take them into account, teaching students how to function in that linguistic reality.

Students' practice of global and innovative tools application on English language learning

Disclosure of the fundamental benefits and (im)possible threats of modern technologies and globally acknowledged educational tools integration into learning/teaching process led to the survey had been conducted where the main aim was to reveal the students' practice and application of modern tools used for English language learning and their benefit. The target group consisted of 87 students studying English at Klaipeda State University of Applied Sciences (KVK) and Klaipeda University (KU), Lithuania. These higher education institutions prepare specialists for various business spheres and English language studies continue 4 (KVK) or 8 (KU) semesters. The same study was conducted among 250 students of foreign languages at the University of Zielona Góra, Poland, both groups were filling the questionnaire prepared in their mother tongue. The interpreted data aimed to reveal frequency and nature of innovative tools usage in English language learning beside conventional studies at school, college or university. The results will be discussed in order to investigate similarities and differences between these two groups.
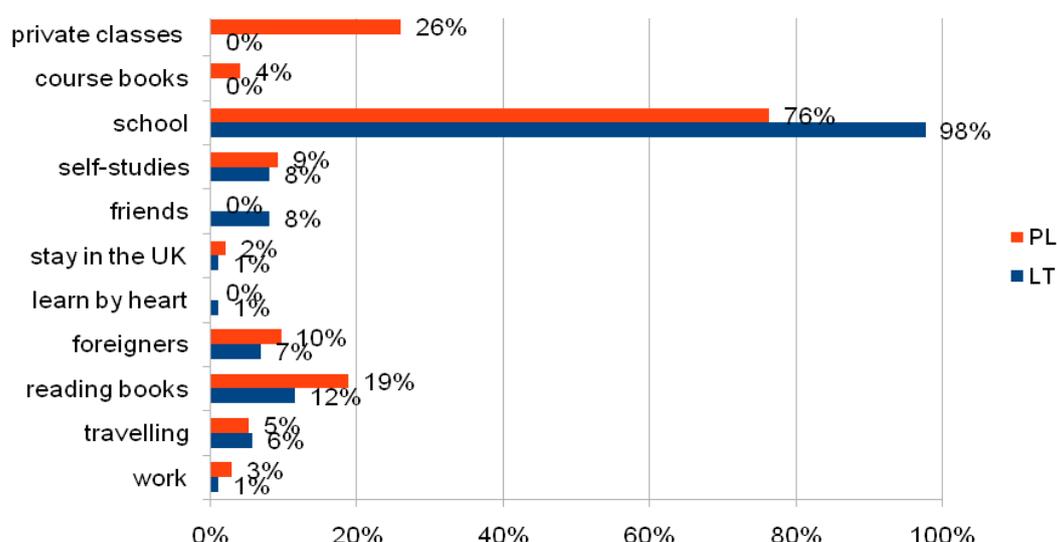

Figure 1. **Traditional language learning methods**

The respondents were asked to indicate how they acquired or developed English language skills emphasizing traditional and innovative educational tools used for this purpose. Following the theoretical material as a basis for the survey conducted, the students' answers were distinguished into two categories. These categories represent the usage of traditional and innovative methods/tools.

The survey data reveals that students apply conventional tools and methods to English language learning. The majority (76 % - PL and 98 % - LT) indicated that English was learned at school using traditional methods as reading, translating, retelling, etc. Besides that, the respondents noted several ways of language learning not included in the syllabus. Private lessons are incredibly popular among the Polish students in comparison with the Lithuanian students (26 % and 0 %). Approximately 19 % - PL and 12 % - LT of the respondents use books for language learning. Learning with a friend was pointed out by 8 % of the Lithuanian respondents whereas the Polish students did not indicate such a solution. Friends or other close people may encourage the achievement of higher learning results, so a possibility to study together is appealing to young people in Lithuania. Self-studies were mentioned by approximately equal parts of the respondents (9 % - PL and 8 % - LT). Self-studies may be perceived as homework to be done at home after school, college or university lectures which seems not to be so appealing to the students. Regardless of that viewpoint, self-study is a functional method where any student is responsible for his/her own time management, accomplishment of assignments and meeting deadlines. Insignificantly smaller groups (9 % - PL and 7 % - LT) learn English communicating with foreigners whom they are able to meet in the street, travelling or at their working places. Almost the same percentage of the respondents (5 % - PL and 6 % - LT) deepens their knowledge while travelling. They pointed that learning on-the-spot is a very attractive method of learning where several aims can be combined, such as cultural awareness, communication skills, openness, flexibility and adaptation. Work and residence in the UK were mentioned by 1 % - LT and 2 % - PL respondents. This choice is reasonably rare due to the students' status. The majority of them are unemployed or cannot be residents of the other country due to their studies in their higher education institutions. While the majority of the respondents are unemployed, it is an opportunity that might be used for deepening English language communication skills, and the respondents are aware of such future possibilities. Learning by heart or repeating information unconsciously was selected by 1 % - LT and none of PL respondents. Currently new learning trends appear, and some of them are based on the neuro-programming and repeating process. As it is proved by the scholars and scientists, the repeating process has to be divided into stages and the entire process has to be arranged in an

appropriate order to achieve the highest results. Such an activity is difficult and students have to devote a majority of their free time to do it.

As one can see, vast traditional learning opportunities have been mentioned by the respondents. Young people do not ignore the traditional methods as books, friends or travelling, but there is always a chance to modernize learning process and integrate technologies into language studies.

Consequently, the respondents were asked to consider more non-traditional or innovative methods of learning foreign language. The results are elucidated in the chart below.
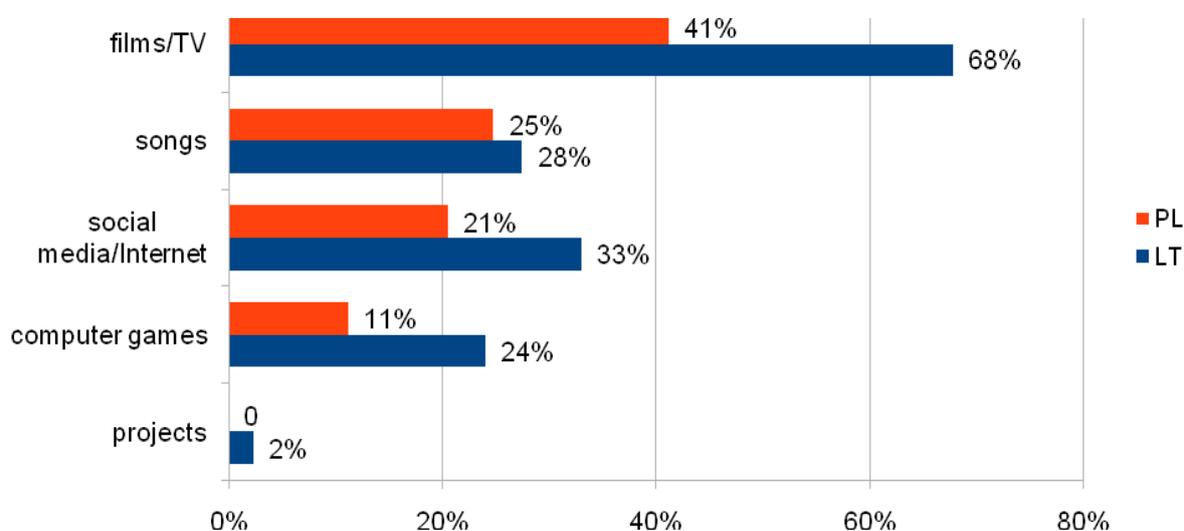
Figure 2. **Innovative and global educational tool/methods**

The respondents demonstrate appropriate understanding of the innovation and technology usage for English language learning. The majority of them (68 %- LT and 41 % - PL) are interested in films or TV programmes in English. Such a tool is available for every learner, and it has diverse aims beside the educational ones. The attractiveness of this tool consists in possibility to see the real-life situations and have some entertainment. Modernized television and TV channels provide the possibility to use subtitles for TV programmes or films. The students may listen and read scripts, thus both the reading and the listening skills are developed. The programme could be stopped or repeated in order to pronounce the text or an unknown word. A significantly smaller but similar in size groups (33 % - LT and 20 % - PL) use social media as an educational tool for learning. Social media comprise social networks (the most popular is "Youtube") and the Internet generally. Nowadays, the "digital" generation prefers an "online" lifestyle. There are limitless educational possibilities: meet new friends, communicate with the old ones, participate in forums where

English is used for international communication, educational websites created by teachers and for teachers, allowing an exchange of experience or a try of innovative methods of learning, educational platforms and virtual learning environments. Songs (28 % - LT and 25 % - PL) and computer games were mentioned by respectively 24 % - LT and 11 % - PL of the respondents. Such activities are not so widely used for the educational purposes by the respondents; especially they are not preferred by the Polish students. The reasons may be a high level or a different type of English used, e.g. American English or complicated accents. Computer games require time and can be referred to as addiction. Despite the disadvantages, these activities retain their educational purposes and help to deepen knowledge in a very recreational way. This means that English is the language of international communication, used in both face to face communication and online interaction. Unfortunately, just 2 % - LT and 0 % - PL noted that projects could be a tool/method used by the students. Nowadays almost every higher education institution is a member of the Erasmus+ network. Participating in the students' exchange programmes provides a possibility to study abroad. As a result, international studies give a competitive advantage and international experience that is valuable in labour market.

Conclusions

The results obtained in Lithuania and Poland, two countries that became members of the European Union in 2004 and are developing fast to join western countries, show that almost all students learn English and they do that in slightly different ways. In both countries the most popular way to learn the language is to attend English lessons at school. In Poland private language schools and lessons are also popular, especially those of foreign languages such as English. Reading in English as well as speaking to foreigners is a way to practice and improve language skills for both Lithuanian and Polish students.

In addition, the survey data indicates that students use modern technologies and tools such as social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, computer games, etc), computers, the Internet, films, songs, etc. In fact, these tools and methods are not currently referred to as innovative ones because every individual is familiar with them and these devices/tools play a vital role in the daily life of students, adults and even pupils at schools. After a review of the theoretical material, it is possible to conclude that students still demonstrate a lack of a deeper perception of innovations and technologies and their purposeful educational usage. Nobody mentioned personal computers or iPads, which are brought to lectures or are undoubtedly used at home, virtual learning environments (Moodle), blogs, apps, new learning strategies suggested by

scientists (neuroprogramming, coaching, etc.), smartphones, interactive boards/tables, etc. Innovative tools have a positive impact on motivation, create a recreational factor during studies and demand to improve and develop the competences and skills acquired.

At the heart of the issue there is the question whether the use of technologies in the English language learning/teaching improves acquisition or development of language skills or if it is simply a distraction/threat. These innovations and technologies help learners with listening and writing (particularly improvements in the amount of writing, length of texts and discourse features of these texts), with some suggestions that speaking can also be improved. However, in such a way students may be engaged in real learning experiences not found in books and speaking activities. One of the threats of using technology is that emphasis is put more on technology than on pedagogy. However, with all the progress taking place in the means of communication, modern educational institution are expected to follow these trends and provide students with all necessary knowledge and skills that they will need in their future professional and private life.

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