IMPLEMENTING TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY IN THE ENGLISH COURSE AT TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES EFFECTIVELY

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Media literacy is one of the 21st century skills, which empowers those who work and study using digital tools and materials. Developing media literacy skills became especially actual during COVID-19 pandemic, when practically all kinds of communication happened online. Education systems all over the world faced the necessity to adapt to new challenges by teaching and learning distantly.

The term “media literacy” has practically the same meaning as “digital literacy” which could be defined as “the skills, knowledge and understanding that enables critical, creative, discerning and safe practices when engaging with digital technologies in all areas of life” [1]. Students usually do not have problems with using digital tools and finding any information they need, but ever-growing amount of data leads to consuming information without properly processing it. Lack of basic knowledge related to analyzing and evaluating the data critically may turn digital world into a dangerous place [2]. That is why educational institutions start to include media literacy in the curriculum, which means that teachers should develop effective ways of teaching it [3]. Besides, media literacy and academic integrity are closely connected. Considering intense curriculums of technical universities, it is difficult to add a separate course on Media Literacy. In this paper we consider the strategies of implementing teaching Media Literacy in the English course at technical universities.

In fact, in order to teach Media Literacy, it is not necessary to change the content of the English course; teachers should try a different approach. Choosing any of the issues studied and discussed in class, students conduct a research considering five aspects (keywords): authorship, format, audience, content and purpose [4]. The keyword “authorship” means that any piece of information was originally written by somebody, and if the readers cannot find the name of this writer, it means that it is simply not mentioned [5]. Therefore, the task is to establish the name of the author. Another key word “format” is defined as “a pattern, plan, or arrangement” [5]. It means that texts of different genres like academic articles, the news, comic strips, etc., may contain the same information, but by using a certain form it is possible to change the attitude to the content. Considering the keyword “audience” which is used to name people who watch or listen to a play, film, someone speaking, etc., the writers think about the preferences of a particular group or groups like students, academicians, teenagers, and present information accordingly [5].
Thinking about “content” or the ideas that are presented by the author, one identifies the message intended for a particular audience [5]. Finally, “purpose” or the reasons of the actions explain why somebody does something or why something exists [5]. In order to respond to a media message appropriately, it is necessary to define its purpose, which may be to inform, persuade or entertain the audience.

It is important for students to see the difference between the basic terms related to media literacy, like “bias”, “credibility”, “identity”, etc. In order to learn any item of language, learners should go through several stages, namely: understand the meaning or meanings of the item, either listen to it or read it in different contexts, learn how to pronounce it correctly, notice its main grammatical features, do some manipulations with it, and repeat the same actions several times [6]. Digital tools like Quizlet make learning, revising and recycling vocabulary more enjoyable [3]. There are several modes in each Quizlet set, going through which students match the keywords with definitions or pictures, learn how to spell them correctly, listen to the audio and repeat, focusing on pronunciation, complete a test and, finally, play a game with groupmates [7].

Eventually, at the final stage of studying a topic, students work in groups and prepare a report about any issue suggested by a teacher or chosen themselves. In order to avoid being biased, they follow “The Rule of Three”, so they compare at least three websites, two of which present opposite points of view. For example, for this purpose a scientific article published in an academic journal, a website of NGO and an official site of a governmental organization may be chosen. Each time students assess credibility of the website or another source of information, they use five keywords as approaches for assessment: authorship, format, audience, content and purpose. The groups present the results of their search, explaining which web sources were the most trustworthy and useful, and which sources were the least reliable and why [7]. Finally, the groups draw conclusions providing the information from different sources and decide which is the most reliable.

To conclude, media literacy is possible to teach at technical universities by implementing the basics in the course of English:

- teaching five keywords (authorship, format, audience, content, purpose) and using them for assessing credibility of information;
- following “The Rule of Three” to compare at least three sources of information, two of which present opposite points of view;
- conducting the research and preparing the report in groups, which allows students to compare and choose the most reliable information.

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