

Original Paper

How to Motivate Students to Study Online

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented change in education. All the schools in Israel and other countries had to find all the possible solutions to convert their teaching and learning to remote online options. According to the research, distant learning with the help of online boards is supposed to catch students' attention and make them interested and motivated (Newton, 2020). You can do it with the help of such smart boards as Zoom, Miro, Wakelet, Socrative and others. They provide teachers and their students with a wide range of eye-catching materials, such as highlighted pieces of text, pictures, videos which enhance general understanding of the material and enlarge students' passive and active vocabulary. Moreover, kids can create their materials themselves and share them with their classmates. Sometimes it is the only way to keep them motivated and to prevent them from leaving "boring online lessons". It also has a great educational effect on those students who struggle while using traditional textbooks and misunderstand the tasks. Besides, online Learning Technology (LT) helps them to develop the skills of collaboration, negotiation and leadership which is especially important in international communication.

Keywords

teaching online, motivation, creativity, learning disabilities, collaboration

1. Why don't Kids Want to Study Online?

In many Israeli schools each class is equipped with a projector, a TV screen and a computer which enables each teacher to conduct a collaborative frontal work, so that students would be able to participate in doing tasks on their mobile devices. But the spring 2020 "brought a sudden shift for teachers and their students into an online setting" (Ralph, 2020). During the quarantine Israeli schools practiced teaching via Zoom and other boards in order to involve kids into online classroom activities, including self-checking tasks. For many teachers it was their first experience, so they had to learn immediately and it was frustrating trying to help students in this way.

“Teaching an online course requires different methods from the traditional classroom, so it’s important that teachers adapt or develop their skills to the online learning environment” (Cooper, 2016). Due to coronavirus pandemic schools in many countries of the world had to conduct lessons online. Many kids and their parents did not accept this idea and complained that it didn’t work well. There are some reasons why school children refuse to study online.

- They are bored
- They are not very strong students
- They are afraid of making mistakes
- They use their personal devices to play games and to communicate with their friends only
- They don’t like studying
- They are too young
- They are distractible
- They have Specific Education Needs (SEN)

Research studies show that computerized lessons enhance learning in less motivated students. Nevertheless, they might be bored while sitting in front of the screen for 45 minutes. So, with the help of videos and other online activities distant lessons become “student-centered and offer the possibility of new classroom management and new relationship between teachers and learners” (Fazinic, 2015).

2. How to Catch their Attention?

2.1 Problem Solving in the Online Classroom

No child left behind! Education leaders are tackling the unexpected challenge of providing distance learning. According to C.Seale, “Distance learning has the strategic advantage of making it easier in some cases for teachers to pinpoint specific academic struggles”. Therefore, due to modern smart boards, teachers can make their lessons effective and help their students to complete the school program in accordance to the national curriculum. In Israel and other countries, it requires developing students’ listening skills, enlarging their vocabulary, improving their spelling and grammar, developing their writing skills and developing critical thinking. For successful online learning teachers need to provide students with tasks that should be interesting, success-orientating and require students to interact with each other. By sharing the same screen content, such as a virtual textbook, picture, video or chart, enable your students to see exactly what they are supposed to do. Avoid too complicated instructions that might cause confusion or misunderstanding. Besides, it must be built on the previous material they have learnt recently.

In order to prevent difficult situations, you need to be creative. As Einstein once said, “Creativity is intelligence having fun”, it is an important aspect of teaching. Being a creative teacher means that you need to be an actor, a singer or an artist in order to entertain your students. It means that you need to “solve problems, think up new ideas and have insightful ‘eureka’ moments” (Brann, 2017). For

instance, if your students get bored you should offer them a game, a song or a film that contain vocabulary, grammar or a topic that your students are learning currently. Therefore, you should have 2-3 lesson plans in store. Besides, you can play a piece of background music to catch their attention, to help them focus while working in pairs or groups or as a sign that it is time to start or stop the activity. If you teach in elementary school, you can play a “switch on-switch off” game. Thus, you can offer them to switch off their cameras and ask questions, such as: “Who has a cat or a dog at home? Switch on your cameras if you have a dog. Great! Switch them off. And now I want you to switch on your cameras if you have a cat”. Then ask them to comment, for example, “Dan has a cat and Jane has a dog. But Mary doesn’t have any pets”. For junior high and high school students you can prepare the similar game based on more complicated questions, including English Literature. If the forenamed game is too easy for them, use Kahoot and other online quizzes. Creative teaching is also important because in this way we can help our students to believe in themselves and to be more confident in learning (Smith, 2017).

2.1.1 Teaching Kids with Specific Education Needs Online

If you teach students with specific education needs, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other disorders, LT can help them because they do not need to write and be afraid of making mistakes. Before the coronavirus pandemic LT had become very popular and made a great progress in SEN schools in Israel—therefore remedial teachers used screens for frontal work and students continued doing tasks on their devices individually and in pairs or groups. During the quarantine it was practiced distantly on smart boards.

Israeli kids like playing computer games and watching films in English. Therefore, usually they are good at speaking, even SEN ones. Nevertheless, the latter ones lack motivation when it comes to grammar learning and practicing it in the classroom when they are taught in a traditional way. They make a lot of mistakes and get frustrated or even start making troubles. During the quarantine some of them even blocked their teachers’ accounts on their personal computers and telephones because after the range of failure in virtual classes, they got frustrated and gave up studying.

If you teach SEN students, be prepared for unexpected situations. Misunderstanding the schoolwork, emotional problems, anger and misbehavior often take place in SEN classes. “The behavior that accompanies this dampened motivation may range from quitting (“school is boring”), avoiding any attempt (“I’m stupid; why try?”), clowning (for attention), denying (“I don’t care about English”), being impulsive (“There! I’m done!”), bullying in the real classroom or trolling online” (Koifman, 2017). Many SEN children hate school but go there just because they have no choice. They do not feel motivated to succeed at school and stop participating in the lessons even so they still dream about high grades. So, the aim of their teachers is to make them focused and interested in learning. Since they like playing computer games, they should be offered to do the spelling, vocabulary and grammar ones.

“The key to motivating the child with attentional problems is to modify and adjust the learning environment” (Lavoie, 2015). Therefore, when remedial teachers start giving online lessons, they need to create a dyslexic-friendly atmosphere in the virtual classroom. Many SEN students find it difficult to focus in class, mainly those who have both dyslexia and ADHD. Therefore, distractible children should be focused and involved in interesting and success-oriented activities which can be done with the help of audio-video tasks. As it was mentioned above, such materials provoke students’ interest. It is also a sort of learning autonomy that makes each student busy and motivated. Since SEN kids have difficulties with reading and spelling, they can have a real help from smart boards and exercises, which correct their mistakes. In addition, it can be successfully used on the exams, which is already done in the range of the countries including Israel.

In my opinion, the forenamed activities can be done distantly on Miro. This smart board provides self-checking tasks. Furthermore, it contains charts for graphic organizers which can enhance SEN students’ learning. Since many SEN students are visual learners, we offer them diagrams on Miro to improve their reading comprehension and general understanding of stories, poems and novels. Those who are aural learners, can be taught with the help of listening to their teachers, peers and audio materials uploaded on Miro before the beginning of the lesson. Both the visual and aural ways work well to develop their Reading Strategies (RS). Remedial teachers should provide SEN students with detailed graphic organizers to guide them as they read a particular text. Such organizers might be the series of prompts that ask the students to preview particular features of text and note how they are related to the main body of the text. It is an effective way to teach RS. Moreover, teachers should divide the classes into online groups of 3-4 kids and they can prepare their own graphic organizers, so that the groups will exchange them later.

“When doing group work, they realize what they need, they can begin to take responsibility for their own learning” (Rosenberg, 2018). Therefore, this is one of the ways to motivate SEN students. In fact, they would like to succeed but they struggle, so Miro enables them to do works in groups, take part in discussions, design a research project, illustrate key concepts, leave feedback, and facilitate group work easily. Besides, you can engage with your students of any level wherever they are. And what is the most important, they can complete and upload their book reports and other projects as a part of the curriculum. And finally, Miro is a very good board for collaboration and other important skills of the 21st century in SEN and regular classes.

3. Studying and Developing Important Skills

No doubt that teachers who work to help students achieve their goals may struggle in the distance learning environment. But there are countless apps that can help educators gather the necessary information in a distance learning environment. “To define success, presume that every single student has the necessary support to participate in distance learning” (Seale 2020). Online teaching supposes

not only academic achievement but learning all the necessary skills of the 21st century, such as:

- * active learning and learning strategies
- * creativity
- * critical thinking and analysis
- * collaboration
- * leadership and social influence
- * debate and negotiation

Schools today provide a lot of material that can be found online and might be necessary for their projects and homework. Step by step the ability to choose and analyze leads to academic achievement. So, students can set their own academic goals for distance learning and follow them in their own pace. On the first glance it seems difficult to learn such skills online but educators can help them with clear instructions and doing works that must be submitted before the deadline.

As it was mentioned above, creativity is very important not only for teaching, but for studying as well. In the online classroom it increases motivation, empowers learners and helps them to develop a sense of excitement and self-esteem. You can encourage your students to create their own activities and share them on such smart boards as Miro, Google Classroom or Socrative, depending on what you choose for them. Teaching is much less important than focusing on whether and how students are learning and creating tasks themselves (Seale, 2020). Making their own activities based on the material that has been learning currently is not only a great way for students to create innovative products using technology but also a powerful tool to increase their motivation, creativity and autonomy. Many students are good at technology and may be interested in preparing their own materials and share them with their classmates. In this way, they will get an opportunity to express themselves.

Thus, many kids like making their own videos and share them with their classmates. They can do it individually or in groups. Other groups can create their own materials, for example, quizzes, crosswords, word games and other appropriate materials for the class smart board. Such online activities make lessons much different from the traditional ones in the real classroom and with textbooks and notebooks. During the lesson you can divide the class into virtual groups and they can exchange their materials with other groups. Later they can give classroom presentations and evaluate each other's materials and performance. In this way they develop the skills of critical thinking and analysis. "Asking students to analyze and interpret primary materials and timely content can boost their critical thinking and engagement" (Ralph 2020).

Besides, in this way they learn the skill of collaboration. While in a real classroom students meet in-person, during online classes, teachers and students need additional resources to collaborate virtually. M. Hart claims that for the virtual classroom teachers need to use the following tools in order to build a collaborative online learning environment:

- 1) Video Conferencing
- 2) Lesson Recording and Video Creation Tools
- 3) Learning Management System (LMS)
- 4) Cloud-Storage Tools
- 5) Exam and Assessment Software
- 6) Scheduling Platform
- 7) Library Resources

In many countries, there is a strong tradition of the authoritarian role of the teacher and the transmission of information from the teacher to the student and most of the lessons are teacher-centered. Nevertheless, nowadays in Israel EFL lessons are student-centered and it is acceptable to challenge or criticize the views of teachers. Besides, Israeli culture has a strong oral tradition, based on story-telling, rather than on direct instruction. Moreover, Israeli EFL teachers started teaching the subject of debate and diplomacy some years ago and their students learn the skills of leadership which enables them to conduct negotiations.

4. International Communication in Israeli School

For the last decade international communication and diplomacy have become a part of Israeli EFL curriculum. Although this subject is not compulsory, the ability to conduct negotiations is necessary and some lessons are devoted to debate. Taking an online course in diplomacy develops skills and ideas that are often highly applicable to many life situations. Moreover, learning to communicate with others in a diplomatic manner is beneficial to relationships at work and home, and in social situations. Therefore, some students choose the subject of international communication and diplomatic studies as a part of their matriculation.

Taking a diplomacy course can provide the beginnings of a successful career in many fields, but it requires a good command in English. The program of the forenamed course is designed to provide knowledge, analysis tools and advanced thinking processes in modern diplomacy and conflict resolution. Students in 11-12th grades come to the educational experience with different expectations and backgrounds, especially immigrants from different countries. As a result, there are often major cultural differences in students, who start learning diplomatic studies, with regard to participating in discussion-based collaborative learning that in the end reflect deep differences with regard to traditions of learning and teaching. So, teachers need to be aware that there are likely to be students in any class who may be struggling with English language, cultural or epistemological issues and they might quit the course, especially new immigrants.

During the pandemic Israeli teachers found out that teaching diplomatic studies online was a sensible way for high-school students to gain knowledge about the field of diplomacy and practice critical thinking. The virtual classroom is an online learning environment that allows for live interaction

between teachers and students and gives them an opportunity to expand not only their knowledge, but also your network all while staying at home. Therefore, it is a real collaboration and a brilliant opportunity to develop the forenamed skills of the 21st century. In order to motivate high school students to take a diplomacy course online, teachers should let them know that it "...offers the opportunity to create a highly social learning environment, characterized by participation and interactivity for both students and instructors" (Brindley et al.).

5. Conclusion

According to the research, many of the strengths and challenges of collaborative learning apply both in face-to-face or online learning contexts. We can teach schoolchildren of all ages and levels online. Some teachers claim that there is no or very little difference between online collaborative learning and well-conducted traditional classroom. Others think that it is still challenging to catch their attention and to keep them in front of the screens for 45 minutes, especially when you teach kids in elementary school or SEN ones in junior high and high school. Therefore, they need eye-catching materials and games on virtual smart boards. Once again, we see that the form of conducting a lesson is less important than the structure of the lesson, the way of teaching and keeping them interested and motivated. It can work well in both contexts. Indeed, it is possible to conduct either model synchronously or asynchronously, at a distance or face-to-face. In my opinion, there is enough evidence that collaborative learning can be practiced online in any age. Teamwork has traditionally played a critical role in traditional schools. And these days, while many of teachers and students find themselves physically isolated, their collaborative work with one another may be more important now than ever and it really motivates them to study together.

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Biography

Julia Koifman was born in Ukraine and graduated from Simferopol State University in 1995 and received an MA degree in TEFL. In 1999 she immigrated to Israel and has taught English in junior high and high school. Now she is an English Coordinator in Beit Ekshtein high school in the settlement of Rupin in the center of Israel. Julia has published articles about overcoming dyslexia and SEN. She is a member of IATEFL and TESOL and a regular conference presenter. In 2018 she won a scholarship for participation in IATEFL conference in Brighton UK.

