

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING AND MEDIA LITERACY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

In today's digital age, where information is readily available at our fingertips, it is crucial for technical university students to develop not only foreign language skills but also critical thinking and media literacy. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer a vast array of tools and resources that can be leveraged to enhance these essential skills within foreign language education [1].

The integration of ICT in foreign language education, especially for technical university students, plays a significant role in fostering both critical thinking and media literacy. In today's digital age, ICT tools provide learners with access to a vast array of authentic resources, enabling them to develop essential language skills while also engaging in analytical and reflective learning practices.

Critical thinking development. ICTs offer a wide range of platforms and resources – online articles, interactive apps, multimedia content, and discussion forums – that push students to not only acquire knowledge but also evaluate, interpret, and synthesize information. Foreign language students in technical fields are often exposed to complex real-world scenarios, case studies, and problem-solving tasks through these platforms. This process encourages them to think critically, assess different viewpoints, and arrive at reasoned conclusions, enhancing their overall cognitive abilities [2].

Fostering critical thinking

Access to diverse perspectives	ICTs provide access to a wide range of authentic materials in the target language, exposing students to diverse perspectives and encouraging them to question assumptions and think critically about information.
Interactive and collaborative learning	Online platforms and tools facilitate interactive and collaborative learning experiences where students can engage in discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities, fostering critical thinking and analysis skills.
Information evaluation and analysis	The abundance of information available online necessitates the ability to evaluate sources for credibility and bias. ICTs can be used to teach students how to critically analyse information and distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources.

Enhancing media literacy. Incorporating ICTs in foreign language education also allows students to develop media literacy, an increasingly crucial skill. Through online news, blogs, social media, and various multimedia sources, students are exposed to different forms of communication, including advertising, propaganda, and editorial content. This exposure requires them to discern credible sources, understand biases, and critique the intent and structure of media messages [3].

For technical university students, who are often trained to focus on facts and logic, ICTs enable them to adapt their analytical skills to digital content while becoming aware of global issues, social dynamics, and cross-cultural perspectives.

Developing media literacy

Understanding media messages	ICTs can be used to deconstruct media messages, analyse their underlying intentions, and identify potential biases. This helps students become more discerning consumers of information and avoid manipulation
Creating and sharing media	Through ICTs, students can create and share their own media content in the target language, encouraging them to think critically about audience, purpose, and message. This promotes active engagement with media and fosters creativity.
Digital citizenship	ICTs provide opportunities to teach students about digital citizenship, including online safety, privacy, and ethical behaviour. This empowers students to navigate the digital world responsibly and make informed choices.

Real-world applications for technical students. Technical university students benefit uniquely from ICT integration due to the nature of their studies. They need to not only learn a foreign language but also apply it in technical fields such as engineering, information systems, or computer science. ICT platforms, like simulations and collaborative online environments, allow them to practice both language and technical skills simultaneously [4]. For example, collaborative tools such as virtual labs, online project management software, and global discussion forums provide opportunities to work on international projects, further honing their problem-solving and communication abilities in their field of expertise.

Specific applications of ICTs

Online language learning platforms	These platforms offer interactive exercises, multimedia resources, and opportunities for communication with native speakers, enhancing language acquisition and cultural understanding.
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Social media and online communities	These platforms can be utilized to connect with people from different cultures, practice language skills in authentic contexts, and gain exposure to diverse perspectives.
Digital storytelling and multimedia projects	These projects encourage students to express themselves creatively in the target language while developing critical thinking and media literacy skills.
Gamification and virtual reality	These technologies offer immersive and engaging learning experiences that can motivate students and enhance language acquisition.

The integration of Information and Communication Technologies in foreign language education, especially for technical university students, plays a significant role in fostering both critical thinking and media literacy. In today's digital age, ICT tools provide learners with access to a vast array of authentic resources, enabling them to develop essential language skills while also engaging in analytical and reflective learning practices.

ICTs have the potential to significantly enhance foreign language education for technical university students by fostering critical thinking and media literacy skills. By leveraging the vast array of tools and resources available, educators can create dynamic and engaging learning experiences that prepare students to navigate the complexities of the digital world and become informed global citizens [5].

It is important to note that effective integration of ICTs requires careful planning and training for educators. The focus should be on using technology to support meaningful learning experiences rather than relying on it as a substitute for traditional teaching methods. Access to technology and digital literacy skills should be ensured for all students to ensure equitable learning opportunities.

By embracing the potential of ICTs and using them strategically, educators can empower technical university students with the language skills, critical thinking abilities, and media literacy they need to succeed in the 21st century.

In conclusion, the use of ICTs in foreign language education for technical university students is a powerful method for developing critical thinking and media literacy. It provides learners with essential tools for navigating today's information-rich world, ensuring they are not only proficient in language but also equipped to analyse, critique, and engage with digital content effectively. As ICT continues to evolve, its role in shaping the future of language education and cognitive skills development will only become more vital.

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