

USING ICTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

Teaching students to be literate is a high educational priority in the Republic of Moldova, as it is certainly throughout the world. The actuality of the article lies in the fact that today the requirements and expectations of teachers are much higher than they have ever been. The purpose of the article is to show how the academic environment undergoes constant change in the context when teachers face the challenges of combining traditional and computer-assisted training. For those students who want to have high performance in a foreign language, it is crucial to know that the integration of modern technologies such as relevant language sources, information, flash cards using computer in the lessons, and the MOODLE system will inevitably support and ease up the learning activity, undertaking finally Internet-based individual or group learning tasks. Teachers who taught learners EFL know that any linguistic support is useful for its acquisition and the research methods proposed by Liaw and Kang demonstrate that students need a wide variety of language experiences. The obtained results certainly show that ICTs can play a key role in providing learners with valuable language experience in learning English in the context of increasing its social value internally and externally.

Key words: *academic environment, computer-assisted training, EFL, foreign language, learning activity, MOODLE, research methods, social value, technologies*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The article's premise is that technology can be used as an effective teaching tool for English language learners. The author discusses a variety of research illustrating how teachers can help English language learners develop their language skills through the use of Internet-based applications for foreign language instruction. During the research, the author will try to elucidate the issue how, first, the Internet can be used to motivate students in their efforts to acquire English proficiency skills, and, second, what are the learning outcomes that the use of the Internet can support, given various kinds of interaction.

Moldovan schools in general rely on the traditional methods of teaching English as foreign language such as the grammar translation method or audio lingual method neglecting genuine opportunity provided by these modern technologies. As consequence for many factors when our students leave the high school students who have studied formal English teaching often remain poor to use the language communicatively (spoken or written) when they encounter authentic situations. Nowadays, teachers of English around the world prefer some form of communicative teaching and learning, rather than the traditional methods of ELT which dominate the teacher-centered approach and neglect the student's communication skills. The teacher-centered approach depends mainly on the learner's memory and does not care about the authentic use of language. Although, a successful EFL teacher is not necessarily restricted to one method or another, the ICTs have changed the pace of teaching strategies to suit the goals of his materials and the needs of his students. On the other hand ICTs have given the students many opportunities to practice English in and out the classroom. With the help of the modern technologies they have time and freedom to understand, reflect and analyze what have been exposed to. Moreover, the ICTs put forward an influential base for efficient education. Now, we need the modern technologies for a better blended method of delivery to create apt teaching techniques to enhance the process of learning English language. ICTs are very motivating, because they help the learners to learn the language which is carefully designed to meet the prescribed goals.

2. COMPUTER-ASSISTED INTERACTION

2.1. Interaction through speaking

According to Liaw, teachers should offer English language learners a language-rich environment in which students are constantly engaged in language activities. Students need to be able to interact with each other so that learning through communication can occur.

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Computers can facilitate this type of environment. The computer can act as a tool to increase verbal exchange. In a study conducted by Liaw, computer applications were used to investigate whether computers increase verbal interaction between students. These computer applications are interactive stories that appear on the computer screen as an actual book with text and illustrations. There are also a variety of interactive choices students can use to read the story, including real voices that read aloud, music, and sound effects. The story is also highlighted so readers can follow along with the text [Liaw, 2007].

Therefore, as the study shows, students interact while using the computer books. Students can be arranged in groups of three to read the stories. Their types of speech used with each other are analyzed. Even though the children have limited English language proficiency, they are engaged in various modes of language functions to accomplish their reading of the computer books. They may make many commands to each other and also share opinions and make suggestions. They tend to ask a lot of questions to their partners and are given responses. The amount of computer-related talk and story-related talk can be measured. Initially, there might be a lot of computer-related talk, but as the students become more familiar with the format of the stories and software, their talk becomes story-related in subsequent sessions. Overall, verbal interaction and the use of a variety of language functions by English language learners can be facilitated by the use of the computer. The group's computer book reading environment fosters language development by providing an opportunity for verbal interaction. The use of the computer can be a useful supplement to the traditional curriculum of the ELL classroom by promoting verbal communication and the acquisition of the English language for foreigners.

2.2. Interaction through Vocabulary

One way to use computers for English Language Learners is to teach vocabulary. Kang and Dennis write “Any attempt to treat vocabulary learning as learning of isolated facts certainly will not promote real vocabulary knowledge” [Kang and Dennis, 2005, p.26]. Students need to learn vocabulary in context and with visual clues to help them understand. Computers can provide this rich, contextual environment. The computer also allows students to become active learners in a one-on-one environment. Computers can incorporate various learning strategies as well as accommodate a variety of learning styles.

“Context group subjects need a period of time to get used to their instructional treatment before they can take advantage of this more engaging type of instructional approach” [Kang and Dennis, 2005, p.27]. Hence, the contextual approach proved to be much more effective in promoting long-term recall of vocabulary. This learning process was made possible and more effective by the use of computers.

2.3. Interaction through Reading

There are several ways in which technology can be used to improve reading ability. Most simple reading texts are also very primary in content. Computers can increase the interest level for students while keeping the text simple and easy to read. Another benefit of using computers for reading instruction is that the computer offers immediate feedback on performance. They also can provide added practice when necessary. According to Case and Truscott, students have been able to improve their sight word vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Computer-based reading instruction also allows for “increased interaction with texts, attention to individual needs, and increased independence through an ability to read texts they would not otherwise be able to read” [Case and Truscott, 2009, p.362]. The computer software provides many fun opportunities for students to practice literacy skills. There are numerous software packages for improving spelling, phonics skills, and grammar and sight word vocabulary. When English Language Learners are learning their foreign language, any and all language experiences are valuable to assist in reading ability.

2.4. Interaction through Writing

As demonstrated, computers and software can help English language learners develop vocabulary skills and knowledge. Computers can also help ELL students develop their writing skills. Lewis recommends that composition for beginning learners should be a guided activity so students do not become frustrated. Writing essays in a language that is still somewhat unfamiliar to students can be difficult. When using a computer, however, the use of graphics can make this much more enjoyable. Using clip art can also help students to convey their thoughts more clearly [Lewis, 2007].

Grammar skills can also be demonstrated and reinforced using computers. The teacher can direct students to somehow highlight a specific part of speech (e.g. nouns) throughout their writing. To highlight, students have a lot of choices, such as underlining, italicizing, or changing the font

size, color or type. Using a computer as a medium for studying grammar is much more motivating for a student as opposed to writing with a pencil.

2.5. Interaction through E-mails

Using electronic mail as a supplement to the classroom curriculum can be effective. The students voluntarily use the e-mail in English. They are self-motivated to use their new language in a new and creative way for them. One of the benefits of using electronic mail includes the scrolling feature that allowed the students to view the incoming message and use its structure as a model for creating a response. The scrolling feature also allows students to easily edit and revise. The major benefit of using e-mail as a language learning activity is the fact that students are using meaningful language and authentic text.

2.6. Interaction through Skype

Using Skype as a communication tool allows users to make audio and video calls easily over the Internet, since calls to other Skype users are free. Skype also offers a computer-to-land-line service for both local and international calls, as a fee-based service. Similar to needing an e-mail address to send e-mails, a Skype account is required in order to make and receive calls. Users choose a user name, which remains with them for as long as the account is active.

Once the user has the necessary equipment and an account set up, he or she can begin using Skype to make computer-to-computer calls. If both the account holder and the party on the other end have web cams, they can make a point-to-point video call. Users can see each other throughout the call. If the connection is slow or if users do not have web cams, they can still make audio calls.

It is important to remember that Skype works computer-to-computer, not necessarily person-to-person. One computer may be hooked up to a large screen and presenter slides may be projected onto that large screen to a group of people sitting in a theatre-style classroom. In this way, Skype may be used to teach groups of people. For teaching, it is key to know that Skype may be used to connect individuals, one individual to a group, or one group to another group. Although Skype could arguably be considered less sophisticated than other web or video conferencing tools, it has some advanced features that make it useful for teaching English, which include Conference Calls, Instant Message or Chat, File sharing and Screen Sharing.

3. ADDITIONAL ICT TOOLS IN LANGUAGE CONTEXT

There are some kinds of technologies classified into information and communication technology commonly used in language context, such as:

- **Interactive multimedia**

Interactive media is the integration of digital media including combinations of electronic text, graphics, moving images, and sound, into a structured digital computerized environment that allows people to interact with the data for appropriate purposes. The digital environment can include the Internet, telecoms and interactive digital television.

- **Audio devices**

Audio devices can be used with other media to form an interactive multimedia. However, it can also be utilized separately as independent tool. Audio devices include speaker, earphone, CD, and etc.

- **Internet**

Internet can be used as a medium of language learning through email, www (world wide web), text, audio and video conferencing.

- **Television**

According to Oxford dictionary, television is a system for converting visual images (with sound) into electrical signals, transmitting them by radio or other means, and displaying them electronically on a screen.

- **Telephone**

This telephone medium has not been widely used for language teaching because of the poor quality of analogue transmissions. However, there is new invent of digital quality and lower connection cost which potential for conference calls.

- **Mobile gadget**

Mobile gadgets such as cell phone and smart phone which are equipped with programs like computer, which enable it to perform as mini personal computer. By using this gadget and its

internet connection, everybody could enjoy chatting, browsing, and discuss each other with the wider range. The advancement of science and technology makes the size and price of those gadgets are getting cheaper and reachable.

- **Social interface**

This media provides facility or example that enables an interaction between human and computer. People set up more interaction with computer in a more intuitive way with less effort-through writing, voice, touch, eye movements, and other gestures. This technology serves as the milestone of the recent development of interactive multimedia, audio-graphic computer teleconference, and interactive television via satellite.

- **Interactive whiteboard**

An interactive whiteboard or IWB, is a large interactive display (such as a touch screen monitor) which is connected to a computer and projector. A projector projects the computers' desktop onto the board's surface, where users control the computer using a pen, finger or other devices.

4. THE IMPACT OF ICTS ON ELT

No doubt, motivation is the cornerstone in the process of acquiring or learning a foreign language; therefore, learners usually have a positive attitude toward computers. Even though, the modern technologies are double-edged sword, their advantages are acknowledgeable over its pitfalls. No doubt, they have significant, positive impacts on ELT, the following are some them:

1. Availability of the Materials. ICTs are very stimulating because of the availability of the learning materials whether it is computer-based, in the web or on CDs; therefore, the student can learn at his own pace with a very patient tutor (the machine). Meanwhile, the use of online telecommunications for teaching and learning via the computer in the classroom across the world will consolidate the improvement of different academic skills. The availability of images, animation, audio and video clips they help much more in presenting and practicing new language.

2. Student Attitudes. ICTs have positive effects on student attitudes toward the language teaching and learning. Students felt more successful in school, were more motivated to learn and have increased self-confidence and self-esteem when using computer-based instruction. This was particularly true when the technology allowed learners to control their own learning.

3. Autonomy. Students have the opportunity to choose the element/s of language which they want to focus on meeting their learning strategies or learning styles. Here, the learner-centered approach is supported by these facilities offered by the ICTs while the tradition techniques approaches failed to give such opportunities. The student feels free to practice the language without fear from the others at their own phase and pace.

4. Authenticity. ICTs provide authentic learning environment, because the learner can interact with others across the continent are very motivating to the language learners. Confronting such challengeable situations is the touchstone for using the language in authenticity not artificially. The ICTs as tools for learning are very motivational; however, they are very attractive and accessible.

5. Multifaceted Tools. No doubt, (ICTs) could successfully contribute to two ends: creating a blend of classroom materials and delivering those materials in multiple ways. They facilitate different activities such as testing, doing exercises and performing different pedagogical tasks or games.

6. Help Teachers. ICTs help the teacher to prepared, produce, store and retrieve their materials easily and swiftly. The availability of different rich texts, different topics, quizzes, exercises help in saving the teacher's time. Despite the opportunities and facilities offered by the modern technologies in assisting better teaching, but they do not replace it. So far, the skillful teacher is the only person who is shouldering the responsibility of delivering and achieving the teaching goals.

7. Student-centered. ICTs help the student be exposed to language clockwise and definitely they help them to write and edit their work in order to produce a well published work. Likewise, computers encourage students to do extra work outside the classroom, play language games and, hopefully, gain extra exposure to the language and improve their progress in the language and support the student-centered concept. Via the computer and the internet the students will be able to

communicate with others in different places. Moreover, ICTs help the shy or the quiet students who sometimes abstain from asking questions or challenging information to communicate and ask questions. Using modern technologies in the learning environment has been shown to make learning more student-centered and improve the learning process by stimulating teacher/student interaction. Furthermore, ICTs enhance collaborative learning which results in higher self-esteem and student achievement. They promote critical thinking and student-student interaction.

8. ICTs in Self-Assessment. The examinations generally test the reading and writing skills of the students, totally neglecting the listening and speaking skills, which are indispensable skills for the learners in their future career. The listening capacity can be tested through computer-assisted packages like listening to a dialogue/passage and answering the questions or listening to lectures and then answering short questions or true or false statements. It will enhance their talents for taking international tests because many competitive exams follow such a pattern to test the grasping ability of the students.

CONCLUSION

Computer-assisted instruction has been shown in a range of studies to facilitate learning in a variety of ways. Computers can be used to aid in teaching English Language Learners in core academic subjects, such as reading and writing. Computers can aid in vocabulary development as well as verbal language development. Ultimately, however, it is important to recognize that computers are not a substitute for effective teaching. Computers are a tool - they are simply one type of supplement to the regular curriculum in teaching English Language Learners as they develop their English language skills.

The use of ICTs in language teaching has countless benefits. The development in the use of ICT, like language lab, videos, satellite broadcast, videoconferencing and web seminars have support the richness and quality of education both on and off campus. The Distribution of the knowledge and learning with more flexibility supports the slogan, “Any space is a learning space.” Therefore, our schools and universities should be equipped with computers and internet services not just tools to learn a language, but they contribute to different aspects of educational development and effective learning. We as Moldovan teachers should be aware of the challenges facing Moldovan education in general and ELT mainly; otherwise we will be wading in the mud of the traditional methods inefficiency if we do not exploit ICTs more effectively and efficiently to attain our goals to adjust to the best quality.

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