

MAXIMIZING TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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***Abstract:** In this digital era, the computer has an increasingly important role in improving all aspects of life. Most people use the computer to make their task easier and faster. Likewise, in language teaching, it has been widely used to enhance the teaching and learning process. Learners as well as teachers can take advantage of computers. Some of the advantages are the so-called Computer Enhanced Instruction, and the electronic mail. Computer Enhanced Instruction refers to language software and courseware that learners can use either independently or in-groups. Internet as one of the most amazing inventions in the 20th century, without a doubt, provides many advantages for teachers and learners. It is the easiest way to access different kinds of information that they need for the teaching and learning process. Next, learners and teachers can make use of emails to communicate and improve their language skills. Considering the advantages of computers in language teaching both learners and teachers are encouraged to use it to improve their skills and to obtain more information.*

***Key words** : Computer Enhanced Instruction, electronic mail, digital era.*

INTRODUCTION

The invention of computers has undoubtedly changed every aspect of our life. Computers enable us to accomplish our tasks easier and faster. Now the world is moving rapidly toward the Digital Era. The virtual reality

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allows everyone in any part of the world to access abundant resources available through the internet.

In language teaching context, technology is a paramount advantage for teachers as well as learners. Multimedia has become one of the widely discussed topics in language journals and conferences. Experts who are dealing with instructional technology or computer-assisted language learning find ways as to how to maximize the use of multimedia in language teaching.

Before the invention of computer and the availability of the World Wide Web, teachers mostly depend on typewriters. However, computers provide more tools to make teaching easier. It is obvious that in the future there will be a shift from the traditional to modern language learning. Mak (1997) mentions the characteristics of the traditional language learning as generally presented in a linear manner and the resources are limited. On the other hand, in this digital era, both teachers and learners can obtain any information they need. News, entertainment, and even on-line lessons are readily obtained from their own room.

Numerous advantages of computers make the teaching and learning process more engaging. For teachers, a variety of computer applications, such as spell-checkers and thesaurus, and multimedia packaged enable teachers to design their desired instructions. Teachers can use computers to perform numerous tasks for learners. For students, the multimedia is a very useful tool to improve their language skills without having to meet face-to-face with their teachers. The multimedia offers pictures, photos, sound, and videos. These can be extremely beneficial for learners who rely on visual audio presentations. Kang's (1999) article, "Learning styles: implications for ESL/EFL" points out the relationship between multimedia and learning styles. Some learners prefer autonomous type of learning. Some research studies also reveal that multimedia is an advantage for learners to develop their own potentials.

Nowadays, many language schools have sophisticated language laboratories equipped with the most recent technological products, such as VCR, computers with CDROM, cable TV, and internet access. Teachers as well as students can work together to make the learning process more stimulating and enjoyable.

Apart from all of the advantages, computers and multimedia also have some drawbacks. The major disadvantage is the cost. Computers and multimedia are costly and many people cannot afford them. Many small

language schools cannot provide these for their teachers and students. They have to depend heavily on the traditional teaching and learning process. Blackboard, chalks, and textbooks are the main resources. This situation does not necessarily mean that the traditional teaching and learning process is not good. It still plays an important role in the EFL/ELS setting. However, given that multimedia offers more stimulating resources and more interesting materials, teachers as well as students may adjust to what it provides depending on their needs in order to be able to achieve their goals.

This article will mostly discuss the advantage of computers and multimedia in creating a stimulating and enjoyable teaching and learning process, motivating students and enhancing their language skills.

TECHNOLOGY AS TEACHER'S TOOLS

Teachers and students can perform various tasks with computers. In order to benefit from computers, they should know how to use the basic and advanced features of computers. Basically, there are four applications that are particularly useful in language learning: word processing, power point, spreadsheet, and internet:

1. The Usage of Word Processing

Word Processing is the most widely used applications. Below are some examples of the use of word processing for teachers:

a. In preparing materials

Teachers can prepare their teaching materials and create supplementary materials for the learning process. The basic features such as creating, editing and formatting documents can be utilized to prepare handouts. The various features of word processing can be employed to create interesting teaching materials. Teachers can insert pictures and photos that they can use in their speaking class. They can also find some interesting pictures that are related to the culture of the target language. In an EFL setting, for example, it is always helpful for students to look at pictures of things that they cannot find in their home country such as bagels, raspberries, the Statue of Liberty, and many others. Teachers can make cue cards with pictures as well. Tables are useful to make diaries or schedules for information gaps in pair work activities. In order to be able to use these features, teachers should

master the advanced features of word processing, such as inserting pictures and tables.

b. In teaching

Teachers can also use word processing in teaching English skills. The most obvious example is the use of word processing in teaching writing and vocabulary. Krull as cited in Pan and Lee (1995) points out that word processing can help students avoid the time-consuming task in editing and revising. The features such as the spelling and grammar checker, if employed appropriately, can enhance the students' skills in writing and improve the quality of their writing. The thesaurus is a useful tool for students in enriching their vocabulary. It provides both the synonyms and the antonyms of words.

c. In giving feedback

Sufficient corrective feedback has been regarded as crucial in language learning (Ellis, 1994). It helps learners understand their mistakes and then produce the correct response. With word processing, teachers can evaluate students' work and give corrective feedback or comments. With tracking changes, students can see their mistakes and also the correct forms because they are highlighted. In giving feedback, teachers can also insert comments and this feature is very advantageous for corrective feedback on students' mistakes in their organization, such as coherence, unity, cohesion, and so forth. Teachers are able to give suggestions to improve the students' papers.

2. The Usage of PowerPoint

PowerPoint is an application that is commonly used for presentations. In a traditional classroom setting, teachers make presentation using the blackboard and chalk. After the projector was invented, teachers can use transparency sheets for their presentations. Nowadays, the task can be made easier by using PowerPoint. Due to the advanced features of PowerPoint, teachers can change tedious presentations into exciting ones. They can make colorful backgrounds, insert sounds, videos, and animation. PowerPoint is indeed a powerful tool in teaching. Its ability to present various pictures, videos, as well as animation aids students in connecting words and their real meaning

and physical appearance. Imagine when a teacher has to make a presentation on the Introduction to “English Literature” course. If he includes some colorful pictures of Shakespeare or the theatres in the eighteenth century, students are likely to have a better perception of the socio-cultural in that era. In teaching listening, for example, teachers can include either authentic or semi authentic material for class discussion.

3. The Usage of Spreadsheet

Spreadsheet is an application in which teachers can use to make grading books. Previously, teachers use calculators to calculate the percentage and average of student’s exam results. This task can be very time-consuming given that they have to count one by one, not to mention the human error in pushing the buttons. In a very big class, teachers will spend a lot of time grading students’ work. Spreadsheets are very helpful because it aids teachers in saving time and enables them to get accurate result. However, to make use of this application, teachers should learn how to perform many functions such as making borders, calculating average, multiplying, and dividing scores. More importantly, they should know how to convert scores into grades. Teachers can also make detailed lesson plans and schedules using the borders.

4. The Usage of Internet

For the past few years, the internet has become more and more significant in every aspect of our lives. Tillyer (1997) describe the internet as “a network of linked computers”. Lewis as cited in Singhal (1997:6) gives the definition of the internet as “a confederation of thousands of computers from various sectors of society such as education, business, government and the military. It is a network of thousands of computer networks”. The internet indisputably makes our lives easier. The whole world is connected through computers and, therefore, many kinds of information are readily available to people in many parts of the world. News, entertainment, education, shopping, and even education can be carried out on-line. People can communicate and chat in front of their computers. In the last decades, communication among people in other parts of the world took many

months and weeks. With internet, people communicate more quickly through electronic mail, which is one of the greatest and the most advantageous inventions in the digital era. Internet can bring entirely complete pictures of cultures around the world into our own room. A term that is often related to internet is the WorldWide Web. The World-Wide Web provides a vast array of information on any topic. Owing to the extensive information in any topic from any part of the world, the WorldWide Web is a tremendously beneficial resource for teachers as well as students. The fact that information in the World-Wide Web contains pictures, animated graphics or clipart, sounds, and movies aids teachers and students in stimulating the teaching and learning process.

a. Electronic mail and language teaching

In communication, e-mail eliminates the barrier of time and distance. But, what is the advantage of e-mail in language teaching? The most notable advantage is the opportunity to exchange information with people around the world using English. The mailing list has been noted as a means to communicate with people who share the same interest from other parts of the world. It is a list of addresses of people, known as subscribers, who share the same interest. Instead of posting a message to one person, a subscriber can post a message to other subscribers in the address list. Some mailing lists have subscribers from all parts of the world. The opportunity to communicate from other people from other countries is beneficial because we should be able to read and digest other people's messages and to respond to them. Students who subscribe to mailing lists have to be able to write critically and interestingly so that other subscribers are interested in reading the messages. Thus, students who make use of this mailing list will be able to practice not only their receptive skill but also their productive skill. E-mail also enables teachers and students to communicate and discuss the topic presented in class. Introverted students whom is generally too shy to ask questions can send e-mail for clarification to their teachers. Students can send their work by attaching them through e-mails and after teachers have done some corrections and suggestions, they can send it back to students.

b. The World-Wide Web and language teaching

The information provided by the World-Wide Web is amazing. Almost all information is available. Most language schools provide internet access for their teachers and students. How, then, can teachers and students use the internet in the teaching and learning process?

For teachers

- Teachers can research for authentic materials. For example, news from *the New York Times* or restaurant menus can be used in teaching reading comprehension. Teachers can also look for maps to teach “direction” in a speaking class. Materials for teaching vocabulary in certain fields such as auction, military, government, and engineering are easy to find. Pictures, photos, sounds, and videos are helpful as supplementary materials.
- Teachers can also look for information on the teaching methods or any other information relevant to their job. On-line articles are becoming more popular and thus teachers can take advantage of them for their job enrichment.
- The online English courses in the internet also provide good supplementary materials for teachers. Teachers can assign students to practice some lessons from the online English courses. When the lessons are appropriately incorporated into the teaching and learning process, they can be very effective.

For students

- The main advantage of the WorldWide Web is the possibility of the students-centered resource-based learning. Stuart Lee (1999:4) suggests:
...the advent of student-centered resource-based learning. The premise being that students need access to greater resources to draw upon their learning, or research, and that technology can achieve this goal. The Web can be viewed as one enormous resource that is interlinked, but ever expanding.

Students can learn English on their own and thus can adjust the pace and the level to meet their needs. The resource-based learning is probably the language learning process in which students can work and search information on their own.

- The various informations on any topic are useful for students in their research. When they have to write a term paper or assignment, they write interesting papers by inserting pictures, using screen captures, and adding sounds.
- In addition to various informations that students can find, they can also benefit from many websites that offer online English courses. Some website are even free and students can practice many skills. Given that they are free and easily accessed from anywhere and at anytime, they can be valuable for students. Although many online English courses still focus on the receptive skills, there are many more websites that focus on productive skills, such as writing and speaking. Generally, teachers do not have time to explain all the lessons. Therefore, these online English courses serve as invaluable inputs for students.
- Students can learn through discovery (Kannan and Macknish, 2000). This is true because students have to work on their own. They have to learn to solve a problem and how to organize the abundant resources they have from the World-Wide Web.

In order to be effective these tools should be incorporated into the teaching and learning process. Teachers, then, will be able to create more fascinating exercises and thus, enhancing and motivating students in learning English.

COMPUTER ENHANCED INSTRUCTION

The possibility to use computers in the classroom as teaching aids has become more popular. The learning in which computers are used as teaching aids is known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The popularity of CALL, then, results in the existence of courseware, computer programs or software designed for teaching and learning. The courseware enables learners to practice their English skills on their own. Some advantages of courseware are:

- Students can select the skills they want to improve. Some students are better in one skill and some are good at other skills.
- They can work in groups or independently.
- They learn English in a more interesting way because computers provide sounds, colors, pictures, videos, games, and puzzles.

- They can practice English anytime they want because there is no time limit and they can repeat the exercises as many times as they want.
- They can receive feedback when they make mistakes.
- They have some exposure in the natural setting, for example the dialect of English.

On the other hand, some drawbacks of the courseware are:

- Students should be computer literate.
- If they work independently, they may not be able to maximize the use of courseware.
- It is expensive.
- Some students may probably be less motivated and interested after sometime because they always have the same exercises from the same software.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, courseware is definitely helpful in improving students' skills when used appropriately.

1. Courseware to supplement classroom teaching.

When used independently, it is completely up to the user how to optimize the courseware. However, in order to be effective, teachers can integrate courseware in classroom and adjust it to meet the needs of their students. Thus, it is extremely important for teachers when incorporating courseware to supplement classroom teaching to always look at the needs of students and consider many factors such as level, skills, type of courseware, and so forth.

2. General uses of courseware

There are many ways in which computers can be used to supplement classroom teaching:

a. As supplementary practice

When teaching grammar, for example, teachers can assign students to practice more in the computer laboratory focusing on the patterns studied in class. When students have problems, they can use them in class discussion.

b. As problem solving activity

Teachers can give students a problem and ask them to make a group work to solve the problem by using courseware.

c. As group work

Students can do a group work and discuss one topic in courseware and then report the result in class.

CONCLUSION

The advancements of technology bring about two kinds of results, the bad and the good sides. However, we must always take advantage of what is offered by technology and use it to improve our lives.

In light of the teaching and learning process, we should be careful in integrating technology in our classroom. Apart from the bad sides, the most immediate effect of multimedia is the increased motivation of students. Teachers should consider numerous factors in incorporating technology in their classroom and also be aware of its limitation. Finally, the careful considerations in applying it will paramount benefits to both teachers and students.

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