

The Impact of Using Technology in Teaching English as a Second Language

Bassma Basheer Nomass¹

¹Department of English Language, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Correspondence: Bassma Basheer Nomass, M.A. Student, Department of English Language, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq. E-mail: bassmabasheer@yahoo.com

Received: December 31, 2012 Accepted: February 7, 2013 Online Published: February 22, 2013

doi:10.5539/ells.v3n1p111 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v3n1p111>

Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the role of using modern technology in teaching English as a second language. It discusses different approaches and techniques which can assist English language students to improve their learning skills by using technology. Among these techniques are online English language learning web sites, computer assisted language learning programs, presentation software, electronic dictionaries, chatting and email messaging programs, listening CD-players, and learning video-clips.

A case study has been done to appreciate the response of typical English language classroom students for using technology in the learning process. Upon this practical study, the paper diagnoses the drawbacks and limitations of the current conventional English language learning tools, and concludes with certain suggestions and recommendations.

Keywords: English Language Learning (ELL), educational technology, computer aided education, modern language teaching tools

1. Introduction

It is well known that our new life is highly affected by the era of information technology, and technology plays an important role in today's human society development. Based on this fact, it is indispensable to take advantage of the modern technological facilities in aiding the task of English language education.

Students trying to learn English as a second language need further language support. They need to practice in hearing language, reading language, speaking language, and writing language in order to develop their experience and skills (Ybarra & Green, 2003). For doing such tasks, they are in need of using various tools which can help them learn the language easily and effectively.

The term *New Technology* includes communication techniques for language teaching in which the personal computer plays a central role (Davies & Hewer, 2012). There are, however, other technological tools that can be utilized in language learning besides computers. Each technological tool has its specific benefits and application with one of the four language parts (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). However, in order to use these techniques successfully, the ELL student should be familiar with using computers and internet, and capable of interacting with these techniques.

The effect of technology has become huge in teaching and learning the language in addition to the instructor's role. In other words, the role of the instructor together with the role of the technology can lead to advanced learning results (Sharma, 2009).

2. Historical Background

Technology and English language education are related to each other (Singhal, 1997). During the sixties and seventies of the last century English language learning laboratories were being used in various educational institutions. The traditional language laboratory was consisted of a number of small cabinets, provided with a cassette deck, a microphone and a headphone for each one. Teachers use a central control panel to monitor their students' interactions. The main advantage of that type of technology was that verbal behavior of students would help them to quickly learn the second language. The students' skills can be enhanced by encountering more practical drill problems. Although the language laboratory was a positive step in linking technology and

language education, this technique was actually tedious and boring for learners (Singhal, 1997). Also, there were minimal interactions between the teacher and his students.

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) software has provided another teaching tool for second language education. The use of computers in English language classroom is useful for both teachers and learners. Currently, there are numerous software application programs available such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation programs, spelling check utilities, electronic workbooks, reading and writing programs, and different learning packages to assist instructors in creating tutorial exercises to enhance their English language courses.

3. English Language Skills

We mean by English language skills, the development of the main parts or elements of the language which are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Each language subject or area has different educational tools that are likely suited with it. The use of several technical tools has a significant effect on the learning process of each area of the language (Sharma, 2009). English language skills are classified as input skills and output skills as shown in Figure 1.

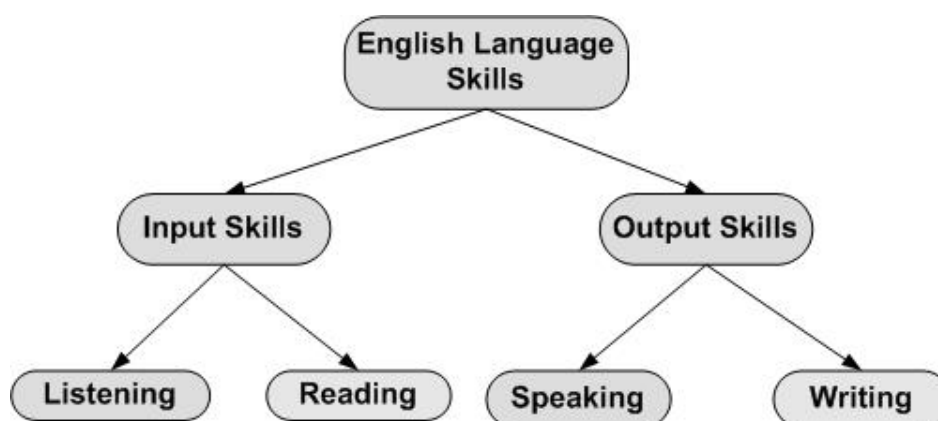


Figure 1. Classification of English language skills

In the following sections, it will be focused on the effect of using technology with each of the English language skills.

3.1 Listening

Listening is defined as the process of identifying and understanding the speech of the speakers. It involves understanding the speaker's accent or pronunciation, speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning (Saricoban, 1999). The listener should be capable of doing these four things at the same time. Therefore, listening is very important in the process of second language education.

Listening is considered as a principal language skill. Through listening people can acquire a large portion of their education, their information, their ideas, and their understanding of the world. As an input skill, listening plays a vital role in student's language development (Saricoban, 1999).

There are several technical ways for improving the listening capability of the ELL student, which are summarized below.

3.1.1 Use of Computers

The use of computers in listening problems provides students with visual and voice inputs which can enhance their information and ideas, and develop their listening skills (Hoven, 1999). Computer-based listening tests are very important in reinforcing the understanding skills of the listener. CD-ROM based learning films can also provide significant advantages over the traditional methods. Finally, Internet voice chatting using the second language may also aid the communication capabilities of the student.

3.1.2 Broadcasting

Listening to TV and radio educational language programs is another technical way for developing the understanding ability. However, the listening student should be careful in selecting the specific programs that are

suitable for his/her needs. News satellite TV channels, like the BBC, are also useful for practicing with audio and video media.

3.1.3 Use of CD-Players

The use of CD-player devices is another modern tool for listening comprehension. CD-players are electronic instruments used specifically to run audio CD-ROMs. Lectures and listening examinations can be saved on these audio CDs for latter use by the ELL student.

3.1.4 Use of Tap-Recorders

Tap-recorders are one of the oldest technical listening tools, and their use is rapidly decreasing now a days. However, they are still be utilized in certain cases and are attached with some English language learning text-books.

3.2 Reading

Reading is the process of understanding a written text by the learner. It is an important input skill which depends on the vocabulary and background knowledge of the learner in the second language (Constantinescu, 2007). During the reading process, the English language learner can improve his vocabulary and terms, acquire new information and ideas, and enhance his real-world knowledge.

Several methods can be utilized to improve the reading ability of the learner through the use of technology. Some of them are summarized below.

3.2.1 Use of Computer Reading-Based Programs

Computers can raise the interest of reading for learners by the use of simple and easy to understand text. Reading-based computer programs can be used to improve the word vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension of the students. This also can enable ELL students to increase their interaction with texts, pay their attention to individual needs, and enhance their abilities to read texts they would not otherwise be able to read (Ybarra & Green, 2003). Computers can perform several tasks simultaneously and run programs at a very high speed. Learning computer programs can check exercises after they are performed by students, move students gradually from easy to more difficult problems according to their abilities. Computers can also be used to correct answers for the learners, and to simulate tests in an easy to understand manner (AlKahtani, 1999).

3.2.2 Use of Multimedia Software

Multimedia are computer programs that use a mixture of text, graphics, sound, video, and animation. Multimedia computer programs can increase the motivation for learners to develop their vocabulary and reading skills.

3.2.3 Browsing the Internet

The Internet is certainly a modern technological way for persons hope to develop their English language skills. There are many Internet web sites prepared solely to enhance the reading abilities of English language learners. There are also a huge number of resources available in the form of newspapers, magazines, journals, electronic libraries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and newsletters (Kenworthy, 2004). Browsing these resources and sites will obviously enhance the learner's vocabulary and reading ability.

3.2.4 Use of Electronic Dictionaries

Another modern way for improving the vocabulary of the learner focuses on the utilization of electronic dictionaries designed specifically for English language learners. These dictionaries have several built-in functions and tools that are not provided in book dictionaries (Constantinescu, 2007). Electronic dictionaries are also easy to use and represent quick tools for vocabulary acquisition.

3.2.5 Reading CD-ROM Based Newspapers

Compact discs (CDs) can be used to store large amounts of information digitally. For example, all the articles published in one newspaper for one whole year can be stored on a single CD. Besides, a searching computer program can locate any subject or article on the CD within few seconds (Seedhouse, 1994). Newspapers which are stored on CD-ROMs can provide an effective and easy way for getting and reading information to enhance the learner's background knowledge and vocabulary of words.

3.3 Speaking

Human communication can be taken place between the speaker and the listener if only they understand each other. Both speaker and listener have a positive function to perform in simple terms. The speaker has to convert his message into spoken language, while the listener has to understand the language of the speaker. Inserting

technology in learning English language speaking can take several forms as indicated in the following sections.

3.3.1 Use of Internet Voice Chatting

Chatting is the process of voice communication between the speaker and the listener through the internet. This process may be very beneficial to the learner if the other side speaker is a native language talker.

3.3.2 Use of Speech Synthesis Programs

Modern computer programs can generate voice signals and decode human sound. These types of programs are defined as artificial intelligence computer programs and can be a very useful tool for improving the speaking capability. Practicing with such programs will strengthen vocabulary and pronunciation abilities as well.

3.4 Writing

The writing process can be very difficult for learners of English language as they must do tasks like generating ideas, organization, and perfect use of grammar and vocabulary. Some of the technical ways for improving the writing skills for the ELL student are listed below.

3.4.1 Use of Computers

Computers can be used to develop the writing skills of English language learners. Writing statements and paragraphs in a foreign language can be very challenging for the students. However, the use of computers and graphics-based programs can make the writing task much easier and enjoyable, and can make them express their thoughts more clearly. Grammar skills can also be improved with the aid of word processing programs. The learner can highlight a specific part of the written text through underlining, bolding, italicizing, or changing the font size and color of the text with the aid of these programs which have the capability of automatically checking the spelling and grammar. So, the use of the computer as a tool in studying grammar is much more motivating for the student than the process of traditional writing with a paper and a pencil (Ybarra & Green, 2003).

3.4.2 Writing E-mails

Electronic mail is a modern way for writing and transferring messages through the internet. Using e-mail can be a very effective means for improving writing skills. Students can use E-mails to learn how to respond to the incoming messages using some formal statements and meaningful language (Singhal, 1997).

3.4.3 Use of Internet Text-Chatting

Text chatting is another important technical method for developing writing ability. It provides an on-line and quick tool for writing and expressing thoughts, transferring ideas, and responding instantaneously with the other side writer.

4. Case Study

In order to assess how typical English language classroom students can take benefits of technology to learn English as a second language, a questionnaire form has been used for this purpose. The form was given to arbitrary samples of students at the department of English language, college of arts, Al-Jabal Al-Gharbi University in Libya. The collected results show the following:

- 60% of the students use technology in their daily life.
- 98% of the students believe that the computer can improve their English vocabulary.
- 96% of the students believe that using computer in the classroom increases students' interaction with learning.
- 75% of the students assure that their teachers **sometimes** encourage them to use technology for learning English language.
- 96% of the students believe that using computer will help them to develop their writing skills.
- 33% of the students assure that their university has a good source of technology for learning English language.
- 83% of the students believe that the use of computer will improve their listening skills.
- 66% of the students prefer using technology to learn English language.
- 98% of the students believe that using technology will help them to learn English language faster than other ways.
- 90% of the students believe that using technology can help them to improve their speaking skills.

5. Analysis of the Results

The results of the case study showed that most of the students prefer the use of technology, especially computers, in developing their second language skills. However, it seems that the technical capabilities of their college are almost poor, and there were a weak tendency for encouraging students to use technology in the classroom lessons.

Some of the drawbacks of using the classical teaching methods in English language learning are:

1. The conventional methods are ultimately based on theory and rarely use practice.
2. The conventional teaching methods are generally not exciting, and miss the motivation factor.
3. The classical methods are generally slower than the modern technical ways in learning the English language.
4. The conventional teaching methods are almost concentrated about the teacher (teacher-centered), while the modern technical methods give students significant role in the learning process.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Using technology in learning a second language has become a real necessity nowadays. This paper has reviewed briefly how technology can be utilized in developing the language skills of the learner. Different methods for using technology in improving the four language skills were discussed thoroughly. A case study was also carried out to estimate the acceptability of some students for the utilization of technology to enhance their language skills. As a result, the following concluding remarks and recommendations can be recorded:

1. As technology has developed, the incorporation of this medium into the instruction process becomes necessary.
2. The computer is being viewed more as an integral part of the learning activity, and as a means by which skills are transferred to learners.
3. Theory and practice in second language learning can be matched together by the use of modern technology.
4. Modern technical ways should be followed for effective learning and teaching of the second language.
5. English language teachers should encourage their students to use technology in developing the language skills.
6. Educational institutions should modernize their technical instruction capabilities by using new equipments and laboratories for supporting the teaching process.

References

- AlKahtani, S. (1999). Teaching ESL reading using computers. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 5(11). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/AlKahtani-ComputerReading/>
- Constantinescu, A. I. (2007). Using technology to assist in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 13(2). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Constantinescu-Vocabulary.html>
- Davies, G., & Hewer, S. (2012). Introduction to new technologies and how they can contribute to language learning and teaching. Module 1.1 in Davies G. (ed.), *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT)*, Slough, Thames Valley University [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod1-1.htm
- Hoven, D. (1999). A model for listening and viewing comprehension in multimedia environments. *Language Learning & Technology*, 3(1), 88-103. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol3num1/hoven/index.html>
- Kenworthy, R. C. (2004). Developing writing skills in a foreign language via the internet. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 10(10). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kenworth-WritingSkills.html>
- Saricoban, A. (1999). The teaching of listening. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 5(12). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Saricoban-Listening.html>
- Seedhouse, P. (1994). Using newspapers on CD-ROM as a resource. *TESL-EJ*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume1/ej02/ej02a3/>
- Sharma, P. (2009, April 8). *Controversies in using technology in language teaching*. Retrieved from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/controversies-using-technology-language-teaching>

- Singhal, M. (1997). The internet and foreign language education: Benefits and challenges. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3(6). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Singhal-Internet.html>
- Ybarra, R., & Green T. (2003). Using technology to help ESL/EFL students develop language skills. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 9(3). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Ybarra-Technology.html>