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THE ROLE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH

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Annotation: This article reveals information about the role of computer technology in teaching and learning English.

Key words: Computer technology, computer as teacher, computer as a tester, computer as a tool.

Today the faces of the world are changing very fast and everywhere we may guess technical effects, scientific improvement of new civilized era. As the most effective one of them is computer that we can't imagine our life without. Computers are the fastest and easiest way for humanity to make a research and look for information, controlling machines and controlling such rockets that are orbiting our planet. With the ever increasing population of computer technology, it is almost impossible to find an educational establishment that does not use it. Computers are becoming a more and more important within education as both a learning tool for students and for keeping records of all individuals at the school. Computers in educational establishments are not just important for the student's learning. The technology can also be used by teachers and administrators at the schools to keep a record of all of the students' details and progress[5]. With every other technology, including computers, educators recognized its importance and debated how to apply each nascent commercial technology for educational purposes. Unfortunately, educators have almost always tried to use technologies to teach students in the same ways that teachers had always taught. So, information was recorded in the technology (e.g., the content presented by films and television programs), and the technology presented that information to the students. The students' role was to learn the information presented by the technology, just as they learned information presented by the teacher. The role of the technology was to deliver lessons to students, just as trucks deliver groceries to supermarkets. It is helpful to think of the computer as having the following main roles in the language classroom:

teacher - the computer teaches students new language

tester - the computer tests students on language already learned

tool - the computer assists students to do certain tasks

data source - the computer provides students with the information they need to perform a particular task

communication facilitator - the computer allows students to communicate with others in different locations

Computer as teacher. In the early days of computers and programmed learning, some students sat at a terminal for extended periods following an individualized learning program. Although we have come a long way from the rather naive thought, held by some



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at that time, that the computer could eventually come to replace the teacher, there has been a return to a much more sophisticated kind of computerized teaching using multimedia CD ROMS. In such programs, students can listen to dialogues or watch video clips. They can click on pictures to call up the names of the objects they see. They can speak into the microphone and immediately hear a recording of what they have said. The program can keep a record of their progress, e.g. the vocabulary learned, and offer remedial help if necessary. Many of these CD ROM programs are offered as complete language courses. They require students to spend hours on their own in front of the computer screen, usually attached to a microphone headset. As an alternative to large CD ROM packages, there is an increasing number of useful sites on the World Wide Web, where students can get instruction and practice in language skills such as reading, listening and writing[2. p 91].

Computer as a tester. The computer is very good at what is known as drill and practice; it will tirelessly present the learner with questions and announce if the answer is right or wrong. In its primitive manifestations in this particular role in language teaching, it has been rightly criticized. The main reason for the criticism is simple: many early drill and practice programs were very unsophisticated; either multiple-choice or demanding a single word answer. They were not programmed to accept varying input and the only feedback they gave was Right or Wrong. So, for example, if the computer expected the answer "does not" and the student typed "doesn't" or "doesnot" or " does not ", she would have been told she was wrong without any further comment. It is not surprising that such programs gave computers a bad name with many language teachers. [4]

Despite their obvious disadvantages, such programs are nevertheless popular with many students. This is probably because the student is in full control, the computer is extremely patient and gives private, unthreatening feedback. Most programs also keep the score and have cute animations and sounds, which many students like[1 p 32]. There are some programs which do offer more useful feedback than right or wrong, or that can accept varying input. Such programs blur the role of the computer as teacher or tester and can be recommended to students who enjoy learning grammar or vocabulary in this way. If two or more students sit at the same computer, then they can generate a fair amount of authentic communication while discussing the answers together.

Computer as a tool. It is in this area that I think the computer has been an unequivocal success in language teaching. Spreadsheets, databases, presentation slide generators and web page producers all have their place in the language classroom, particularly in one where the main curricular focus is task-based or project-work. But, by far the most important role of the computer in the language classroom is its use as a writing tool. It has played a significant part in the introduction of the writing process, by allowing students easily to produce multiple drafts of the same piece of work.. Students with messy handwriting can now do a piece of work to be proud of, and those with poor spelling skills can, after sufficient training in using the spell check, produce a piece of writing largely free of spelling mistakes[3 p 71].

Computer as a data source. I'm sure I don't need to say much about the Internet as a provider of information. Anyone who has done a search on the World Wide Web will



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know that there is already more information out there than an individual could process in hundred lifetimes, and the amount is growing by the second. This huge source of information is an indispensable resource for much project work, but there are serious negative implications. During the lessons the students are not turned to be free to search the web for information. Instead, I find a few useful sites beforehand and tell the students to start there; anyone who finishes the task in hand can then be let loose!

As an alternative to the Web, there are very many CD ROMs, e.g. encyclopedias, that present information in a more compact, reliable and easily accessible form.

Computer as communication facilitator. The Internet is the principal medium by which students can communicate with others at a distance, (e.g. by e-mail or by participating in discussion forums). In fact at Frankfurt International School the single most popular use of computers by students in their free time is to write e-mails to their friends. Some teachers have set up joint projects with a school in another location and others encourage students to take part in discussion groups. There is no doubt that such activities are motivating for students and allow them to participate in many authentic language tasks. However, cautious teachers may wish to closely supervise their students' messages. Recent research has shown up the extremely primitive quality of much of the language used in electronic exchanges!

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