

THE 'IT' TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING LANGUAGES

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Not just modern anymore but rather vital nowadays in all fields of activity, the IT technology – with everything that belongs to it, from computers to the web searching devices – has become a means of teaching and learning and a necessary 'tool' for preparing the educational endeavour. Pros and cons regarding the use of this method are also to be depicted.

Introductory remarks

When considering the need of developing the educational process by the use of new methods of teaching, the IT technology is a landmark. While, in this respect, e-learning and distance learning have lately been much emphasized, the use of computers in everyday classes seems rather reluctantly regarded as equally important.

If the use of the IT technology was until recently a very modern, somewhat sophisticated and certainly a through breaking method of teaching, it has lately become a necessity and an every day 'tool' in teaching languages. Together with audio and video devices such as the cassette / CD recorder / player, the TV set and the video / DVD recorder / player, the computer comes to make teaching not only more appealing but also up-to-date and more resourceful, more offering and more diversified in what the materials used and the methods implied are concerned.

Whether we consider teaching – from preparing the material for the lecture to exposing the course and the activities of the practical course – or learning – from mere drill solving to preparing more demanding assignments such as presentations and projects – we can easily understand that a PC has become a 'must' for both teachers and students.

The personal computer

A simple PC is nowadays the least one should obviously possess in order to be able to meet the requirements of modern teaching and learning.

The ability to operate an IT system, to use basic programmes such as Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat or Microsoft PowerPoint is nowadays a necessary skill as teachers of languages, as well as students, as a matter of fact, will have to use or work with text file, word documents (to produce, respectively solve, various drills, the most diversified files of exercises from multiple choice to gap filling), pdf (printable document format) file (to protect the document from being modified but to use the text for reading, translating or discussing upon) or ppt (power point) files (mostly for presentations).

More specialised software such as dictionaries, reading, pronunciation or translation devices may be also useful and prove as tools interesting to try even though not flawless.

The use of a video projector attached to a computer or a laptop is the solution for larger groups of students or lectures in amphitheatres where, obviously, there isn't a computer in front of each person.

The network

If a PC is an urge for each home, the Local Area Network (LAN) has become rather compulsory for the laboratories in an educational institution. A language laboratory with a network of computers will allow teachers to present the material more appropriately, each student being able to access it on the computers in front of them, they will be able to work on computer solving the drills and rapidly scanning and browsing whatever material has previously been given, taught and introduced on the network, so revising theory or permanently having the possibility of accessing all the files that might be necessary: schemes, graphics, grids. Templates and patterned predefined exercises allow teachers to introduce data, to compose the drills and, then, the solutions offered by the students are to be checked and marked by the computer itself in accordance to the model put in by the teacher, permitting self – correction of numerous students.

Instead of the obsolete chalk and blackboard, a soft may be used to have students see on their computers what the teacher presents or writes in real time on his / her computer. (The ideal solution is to combine this with a video projector as explained above).

An even more specialised soft for the network would be of very much help: one providing the teacher with the ability of randomly accessing from his / her chief computer, those of the students' in order to instantly monitor their work, visualising the files they work on, and so selectively checking them.

Again some additional devices prove necessary when teaching language is involved: headphones from each student would allow them to listen to the audio materials on specialised CDs, not bothered by the others and moreover each with a particular material, according to their level. Adapting to all personal needs (as more repetitions, louder sound) is not a problem in such independently usable facility.

A really functional phonetic laboratory, so useful in teaching languages, is not far from being set up if to these facilities some privacy booths are built, some microphones are supplied and the appropriate soft is provided, offering the students the possibility of recording themselves and the teacher that of selectively verifying each student in turn from his / her system.

The internet

Besides the obvious usage of finding up to date and last minute authentic material for the classes, from latest news in the business field useful to discuss upon, in comprehension or conversational drills, from magazine articles or reviews, useful for introducing special vocabulary and practising the skills of reading and pronunciation to other various specialised data useful for preparing courses or in the students reports, projects and other assignment, there are more and more sites offering language drills with online solving and instant checking which would be really helpful and quite attractive for students as well. The

almost endless informational possibility that the internet provides, the openness and the facile source of specialised resources are obviously points in favour of it, balancing the costs if appropriately and intelligently exploited. Web pages with links for exercises can be produced and all students will be able to access them, and make suggestions for new links. Online tests offer the possibility of spontaneous checking, providing the solutions and accelerating the whole process. Various tests of template nature input by the teacher on certain web pages can be accessed and exercised whenever convenient for the student by help of internet connection.

Advantages and disadvantages

There might arise controversial discussions when it comes to using the IT technologies in teaching English. Mentioning some pros and cons would provide a parallel analysis and prove the lowering of the advantages' pan of the balance.

The list (see Table 1) is based on an authentic survey among students using IT technology in learning English.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a lot of information – actuality, up-to-datedness – interactivity – attractiveness, appealing method – rapid solving and correction – more exercises solved – more knowledge accumulated – varied free material sources – available, at hand resources – possibility of instantly finding the solutions, (in online tests or in patterned, templates exercises) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – investment in the hardware, software, additional equipment and lab designing – difficulty of acquiring authorised soft – maintenance costs, costs for services provision (eg. Internet) – supplementary costs in case of damage or malfunctioning – need for specialization and training, inconvenience met by the inexperienced – higher volume of teachers work for getting much more material due to the rapid solving

Table 1

Conclusions

How do pros outweigh the cons? Considering the instructive side of the matter as the one that presents the most relevant interest for our approach it is doubtless.

Though disadvantages seem to occupy a rather great room in the table, the nature of the pros and cons specified clearly convey the fact that, in what the benefit for students, teachers and educational process are regarded, the advantages are the ones to prevail, the opposite aspects – the cons – being mostly, and merely, of administrative – and material – concern.

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