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## Supporting English Language Learners through ICT

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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 purpose of the article is to show why the classroom environment undergoes a constant change, and how teachers face the challenge of combining the traditional instruction with the computer-assisted one. For those students who want to become proficient in a new language it is a very difficult transition. Instructors who have taught students learning English as a foreign language know that any language support is helpful for their language acquisition. The methods proposed by Liaw and Kang have demonstrated that students who learn English need a variety of language experiences. We believe that ICTs along with computer literacy can play an integral part in providing ELL students with valuable language experiences as they learn a new language in the context of its both domestic and foreign social value growth.*

*Keywords: technology, learner, proficiency, CAI, fluency, comprehension, software, interaction*

### 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.

### 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. Computers can facilitate this type of environment. The computer can act as a tool to increase verbal exchange. In a study conducted by Liaw, computers applications were used to investigate whether computers increase verbal interaction between students. These computer

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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 become 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. 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 aide 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.

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