

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN ENGLISH TEACHING**

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Technology in language teaching is not new. Indeed, technology has been around in language teaching for decades – one might argue for centuries, if we classify the blackboard as a form of technology. Tape recorders, language laboratories and video have been in use since the 1960s and 1970s, and are still used in classrooms around the world.

Computer-based materials for language teaching, often referred to as CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), appeared in the early 1980s. Early Call programs typically required learners to respond to stimuli on the computer screen and to carry out tasks such as filling in gapped texts, matching sentence halves and doing multiple-choice activities. Probably one of the best-known early CALL activities is that of text reconstruction, where an entire text is blanked out and the learner recreates it by typing in words. For all of these activities the computer then offer the learner feedback, ranging from simply pointing out whether the answer is correct or incorrect to providing more sophisticated feedback, such as showing why the learner is mistaken and offering remedial activities. The CALL approach is one that is still found on many published CD-ROMs for language teaching.

As access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become more widespread, so CALL has moved beyond the use of computer programs to embrace the use of the Internet and web-based tools. The term TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) appeared in the 1990s, in response to the growing possibilities offered by the Internet and communications technology.

Although the use of ICT by language teachers is still not widespread, the use of technology in the classroom is becoming increasingly important, and it will become a normal part of ELT practice in the coming years. There are many reasons for this:

- Internet access – either in private homes or at Internet cafes – is becoming increasingly available to learners.

- Younger learners are growing up with technology, and it is a natural and integrated part of their lives. For these learners the use of technology is a way to bring the outside world into the classroom. And some of these younger learners will in turn become teachers themselves.

- English, as an international language, is being used in technologically mediated contexts.

- Technology, especially the Internet, presents us with new opportunities for authentic tasks and materials, as well as access to a wealth of ready-made ELT materials.

- The Internet offers excellent opportunities for collaboration and communication between learners who are geographically dispersed.

- Technology is offered with published materials such as coursebook and resource books for teachers.

- Learners increasingly expect language schools to integrate into teaching.

- Technology offers new ways for practising languages and assessing performance.

- Technology is becoming increasingly mobile. It can be used not only in the classroom, lecture hall, computer room or self-access centre, it can also be used at home, on the way to school and in Internet cafes.

- Using a range of ICT tools can give learners exposure to and practice in all of the four main language skills – speaking, listening, writing and reading.

The technology needed to use the Internet for teaching is relatively limited and the chances of something going wrong are greatly reduced over more complex technology approaches such as attempting to carry out live or video-conferencing sessions.

Another advantage of this tool is that you do not necessarily have to rely on a constant Internet connection if you bear in mind that it is possible to save local copies of websites on your computer, or print out potentially useful pages for later use. Indeed, you can use web pages in the classroom in a variety of ways:

- as printed pages, with no computer. Although printing is not necessarily the cheapest option, it is certainly a viable one in places where there may be limited access to the Internet. Indeed, a lot of activities using web pages will only necessitate the printing of one or two pages, which can subsequently be photocopied;

- with one computer with an Internet connection. This can be enhanced by connecting the computer to a data projector or even an interactive whiteboard, allowing for greater visibility in class, but it is also possible to make use of a single computer on its own connected to the Internet for reference;

- in a computer lab with a set of networked and connected computers. If you are lucky enough to be in this kind of situation, then you are ideally placed to incorporate Internet content into your regular teaching.

It's important that both you and your learners see the use of the Internet as an intrinsic part of the learning process, rather than as an occasional activity which has nothing to do with their regular study programme. We would therefore recommend that, if you plan to use the Internet, you should talk to your learners and explore the reasons for using this resource with them. This can be done at lower levels in their own language or in English with higher-level classes. You will need to talk to your learners about why Internet content may be useful to them and discuss their attitudes to technology in general – when they use computers, and what for. Show them how the course book and other materials can be enhanced by extra material from the Internet, but above all, make it clear that this is not a toy, not something that you are just using to fill in the time.