
Chapter 19

Using Computer Technology for Language Learning in the Primary Classroom

by

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Introduction

“Now the real challenge facing us is to enable Egypt to enter the age of advanced technology, which is radically different from any agricultural or industrial revolution which humanity has witnessed...No longer is it possible for us to lag behind in this age, or to be reluctant to secure Egyptian abilities and the skills necessary for conquering new fields, which form our basic access to the next century”.

-President Mohamed Hosny Mubarak, (1998)



Why Should We Use Computer Technology?

Technology is what we do with it. Technology offers exciting possibilities for supporting teachers and students in language teaching and learning if we use it wisely and well. Here are some of the many things computer technology can do for you and your students: Technology can:

- bring far away places into your classroom and promote language learning by providing real conversations with other English speakers and learners in all corners of the earth
- support your direct teaching in the classroom by providing you with teaching tools and resources
- provide rich visual and audio and interactive contexts to promote vocabulary learning
- help learners develop English literacy through rich experiences with many kinds of reading materials and learning programs
- help children learn to write by first allowing them to watch as their sentences are composed before them and later by creating their own writing pieces and by making it easy for students to revise and improve their writing
- bring stories to life, read them aloud to students, check their comprehension, helping them find pronunciations and translations of new words as they read
- make translations of difficult language more easily available
- provide activities for children that give them feedback and that get progressively more challenging as children learn

But technology itself cannot make these things happen - rather, those who use it carefully and intelligently make them happen. Computer technology will never replace good language teachers, rather, it requires teachers with knowledge and judgment. But technology can provide rich support and resources to both students and teachers. If we choose to teach in the 21st century, we must also choose to become knowledgeable about how to use computer technology to support our teaching and our pupils' learning.

What Computer Technology is Available in Egypt?

Though computer technology is just beginning to be used in primary Egyptian classrooms, already over 8000 primary schools have been equipped with multimedia facilities (Mubarak 1999). Multimedia facilities include computer hardware and software to use video (picture), audio (sound) and interactive abilities all at once.



Multimedia Facility

Computer hardware consists of the machines that make electronic communication possible. Computer software consists of the programs that help the machines do specific things. By interactive capabilities we mean that the computer responds in various ways to input typed in by a student or teacher. For example it will tell them if their answers are correct or not by giving them "rewards" of video clips or games to play, or by offering them choices about what they want to do next. Some multimedia computers have access by telephone lines, special dedicated cable lines, radio waves or satellite to a worldwide network of information and communication resources called the Internet, or the World Wide Web.

Sometimes multimedia facilities in Egypt consist of one computer in a multimedia room. Sometimes a special classroom in a school is outfitted with a computer with hardware for projecting a video picture onto a large screen and amplifying sound so that a whole class can watch it together. Some classrooms in secondary schools are outfitted as computer labs so that many students can work at once. These are used primarily for technology instruction.

Though there are many kinds of classroom computer technologies, we have chosen to focus this chapter on ways of using technology in the one-computer classroom because this is the resource to which primary teachers in Egypt are most likely to have access. We have also chosen to focus our discussion on low-cost, easily accessible (often free) software and web resources in order to speak to the broadest audience of Egyptian primary teachers and teacher supervisors from the Faculties of Education and Ministry of Education who have access to computer facilities.

Goals

The goals of this chapter are to:

- discuss the value of using computer technology in primary EFL teaching
- introduce and provide examples of five kinds of computer applications that are highly useful in language classrooms and available to primary teachers in a one-computer classroom.
 - Word Processing
 - Presentations
 - Multimedia programs
 - Communications
- Web Browsers
- recommend other rich resources and types of resources that are available for EFL teachers in primary classrooms

Five Computer Applications for Primary English Classrooms

1. **Word Processing Software.** All computers are easily equipped with software for creating and manipulating text - most computers today come with this software already installed. Widely used examples are *Microsoft Word* or *Corel WordPerfect*, which come with many, many features to make it easy to create, edit and revise text. Other word processing software, for example, *Storybook Weaver* or *The Ultimate Writing and Creativity Center*, are designed particularly for younger learners. Word processors are simple tools that can be used very powerfully in the one-computer classroom. Teachers and students must first learn a few basics - how to type in text (keyboarding), how to edit and format the text, and how to save and print a file. Then there are hundreds of ways to use word processing in a language classroom: for teacher plans, student writings, worksheets and handouts, record-keeping, just to name a few. Using word processing for Shared Reading is explained in some detail below.

Shared Reading. A word processor can be used for many classroom activities. For example, it can provide the enlarged text needed for a strategy like *Shared Reading* (see Chapter 11: Shared Reading for a complete description). To use a word processor for shared reading,

- You could type in the poem at the end of Unit 25 of *Hello 1*. (See below.)
- Then you could change it to a very large font, as below (The size depends

on the size of your classroom and screen, but about 24 point font is usually large enough).

- You could use this text on the computer screen with a small group of students, or, if you have the hardware to project your text on a large screen, you could have the large text you need for a whole class shared reading activity.
- You could scroll down the page as you read it to help your students focus on the text that is being read.
- You could re-read the text many times, having students read along.
- You could have students learn about language by analyzing the text in many ways, e.g., finding rhyming words, punctuation marks, or vocabulary terms.
- You could copy and paste the text into a new file and cut out key words for students to write as they read the text orally or as a written exercise.

School is Over
School is over,
Oh, what fun!
Lessons finished,
Play begun.
Who runs faster,
You or me?
Who jumps higher?
Come, let's see
Play's begun
Oh, what fun!
School is over,
Come, let's run.

In this way, the computer can function like a flexible blackboard - one

- that remembers what you've written on it,
- that you can change easily,
- that you can erase for a while and yet bring it right back again,
- that you can add millions of pictures to, and
- where you can show only one line at a time to focus student attention.

Microsoft PowerPoint, Corel Presentations or *HyperStudio* to organize plans, materials and activities for your lessons into a series of slides that are presented on the computer. In these slides, you can combine text with pictures, video clips, sound clips and even links to the web or to other software programs.

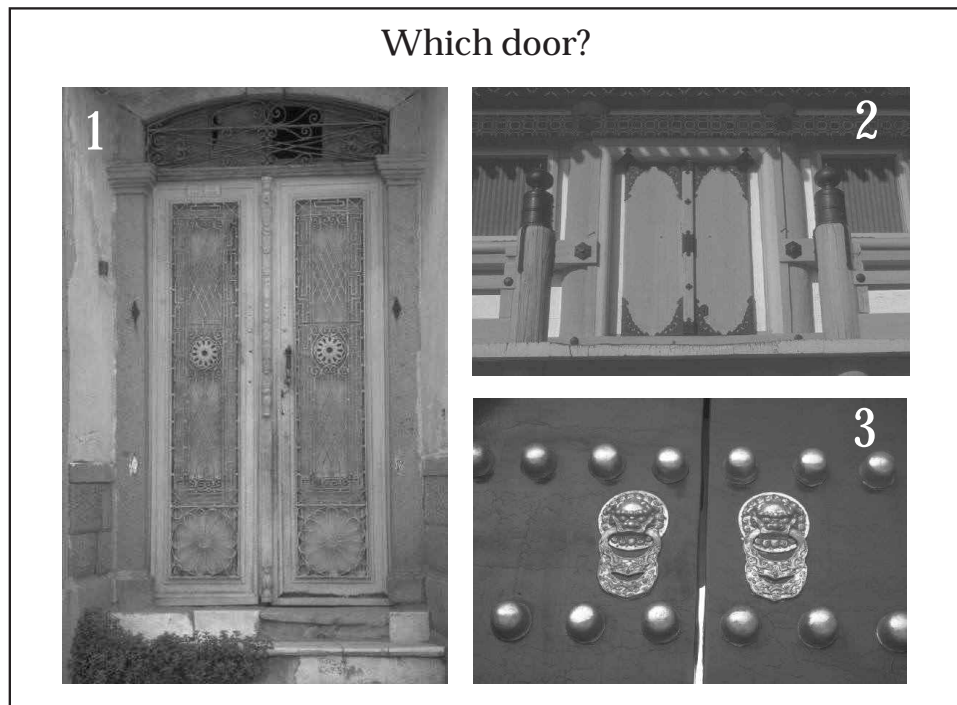
Showing text and visuals. For example, if you were teaching about people in different professions and where they work in *Hello 1, Unit 10*, you could incorporate photographs of teachers, nurses, mechanics and farmers at work into your slide show and have students discuss what they see. You could also incorporate a quiz in which you show a slide of one of the people and students tell you which occupation they represent. Below is an example of a slide from a presentation on occupations. When you project the slide, you can introduce one line of text at a time and focus your students attention on the exact language you are reading and teaching. You can read to the students, then you can read with them, or you can have different groups of students read different parts of the text (E.g., the girls read the black text; the boys respond with the brown text).

Hello, what are you?
I am a nurse



Where do you work?
I work in a hospital

Presenting Activities and Games. Below is a teacher-made slide from a quiz game. (All the door pictures were downloaded from clip art files). Students choose a door and answer the question linked to the door. Their answer is linked to a file that tells them if they are right or wrong and gives them an explanation of the answer.



3. **Multimedia software.** All kinds of software for language learning combining video, sound and interactive capabilities are now available via CD-ROM (Compact Disks with Read Only Memory) and directly from the Internet. DVD (digital videodisc) Technology is expanding the possibilities of multimedia technology even further.

"Trade Book" story software such as *Monster Goes to School* (Meyer) or *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss), published by Broderbund, are delightful sources of multimedia literature with beginning-level stories. Students can choose to hear a story, to read a story page by page, read alone and get help only when they need it, "play" with the words and pictures in the story, sing along with songs about the story, and do a number of activities relating to the story. If you have a stand-alone computer in your classrooms, small groups of 2 or 3 students can take turns using software at the computer center. If you have projection capability, you can use the software as a group, with children taking turns at the keyboard and others responding in unison or when called upon.

Though much of the software now available does not begin to tap teaching and learning potential, current technology can provide the support students need to make text in the new language comprehensible and to enable students to begin to learn to read and write that text. Cummins (1998) proposes a computer-assisted language learning system in which "learners choose and self-regulate the type and degree of support they need." Learners can choose to read extensively, focused on comprehending text and taking

advantage of linked glossaries and background information. They can also spend time using linked resources to explore the structure of the target language in general and of the language of text in particular. Through multimedia, the potential exists to create very intelligent software that responds differentially to student errors, adapts readings and exercises to the level of the student, and recognizes student speech. For suggested multimedia software, see Healey (1998). McCloskey & Thrush have created a series of "WebTexts" which are teacher-made supported texts. These are accessible to anybody through [<http://www.mindspring.com/~mlmcc>].

In addition, software is available for many, many other uses in the language classroom. On-line programs provide comprehensive tutorials for individuals (e.g. Global English) to provide you with picture dictionaries and activities for vocabulary learning (See the sample online resources at the end of the chapter.)

4. **Communications software.** E-mail is a simple means of transmitting text electronically via computers connected to phone lines or other means. Communications software enables us to send, receive, sort and file e-mail. Uses of e-mail for learners of English are rapidly increasing in number and include: sending and receiving messages with other staff members, communicating with parents, turning in homework, homework help-lines, monitoring weather and climate (or bird sightings, etc.) world-wide and reporting them to researchers, or providing feedback on student writing. E-mail can also be used for real-time discussions in a "chat" format. Teachers and students can participate in on-line "conferences" with experts or celebrities.



E-Pals. Students can use several websites to find e-pals with whom to practice their English. Class-based e-pal exchanges are motivating for learners of English, since students are writing for real audiences from which they receive responses. To make sure that students receive responses to their messages, try having a class correspond with another class, rather than an individual with an individual.

During the 2000-2001 school year, Heba, a fourth year teacher from Cairo and Dianne, a fourth year teacher from Atlanta, Georgia, USA set up an e-pal correspondence between their two classes that helped them learn about one another's cultures and practice reading and writing in English. Following are two excerpts from correspondence they exchanged:

Dear Dr. Mancus and Class,

I'm Mrs. Heba and I am an English teacher in Cairo, Egypt. I teach English to two classes: a third grade and a fourth grade. My fourth graders will be very glad to answer you back and to exchange all the information you need to know about Egypt. This mutual exchange of information will be useful to both of us hopefully, because I'm sure my students have a lot of questions they would wish to ask you too. Their answers to your questions will provide meaningful reading texts to both classes, which will eventually improve my student's standard of English, especially because English is not our mother tongue.

If you kindly send me the names of your 27 students, I'll gladly send you how they are written in Arabic.

My class and I will be really happy to write to you.

Until the next E-mail,

Best wishes,
Mrs. Heba

Dear Mrs. Heba and Class,

We are fourth grade students in Dr. Mancus' class at Indian Creek Elementary School in Atlanta. We have 27 students from 10 countries: Bosnia, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Eritrea, The United States, India, Pakistan, the Sudan, Somalia, and Spain.

We are reading "The Seal's Journey" in reading class. In science, we are learning about the ocean. In social studies, we are learning about the Olympics and maps. We also study music and English and math and spelling. We hope you will write back soon and tell us about Egypt. We thought of some questions we wanted to ask you about living in Egypt. We hope you will answer some of them. Here they are:

1. How do you start speaking Arabic? Are your books in Arabic or English?
2. Is there such a thing as a mummy? Do mummies have weddings or reunions?
3. What is it like in Egypt? How is the weather over there? Do you have lots of sand?

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4. Who is the leader of your country?
 5. Have you heard of Harry Potter? What kind of homework do you have?
 6. Who built the pyramids? How many pyramids are there? Have you been inside one?
 7. Do you know about The Backstreet Boys? Do you know our songs?
 8. Do children play with Pokemon cards in Egypt? What games do you play there?
 9. What do you like to eat? Do you have hamburgers for lunch sometimes?
 10. What kind of teacher do you have and what is her name and what are the kids' names?
 11. What are your houses like? Are there many cars there?
 12. What kind of clothes do you have?
 13. What happens on New Year's in Egypt?

We hope you will write back and tell us about Egypt.

Your friends,

Dr. Mancus' class and Dr. Mancus

5. **The World Wide Web.** Websites are linked electronic "pages" or documents that include text and visuals. Often, authors use hypertext software to highlight terms or pictures and link them to other pages with information on the topic. These links create the World Wide "Web" (WWW) or network of information. Since there is so much information, it can be very hard to find what you need. Tools have been developed to help you. These include Web Browsers (such as *Netscape Navigator* and *Internet Explorer*) which offer access to ready-to-use ESL sites with learning and fun activities and provide "search engines" to help users find hundreds more.

Search Engines. Via the WWW, computer users can search for and link to computer websites on every topic under the sun in locations all over the world. There are many good search engines available for free on the World Wide Web. Using search engines like *Google.com*, *AskJeeves.com*, and *Yahoo.com*, you can find resource materials and pictures about any topic you are studying, language learning tools, on-line dictionaries, on-line encyclopedias, complete texts of non-copyrighted books (such as English language classics), songs, chants, e-pals and almost any other kinds of information you might need. While you are doing *Hello 1*, Unit 19 on Grandfather's Farm, you can find photos of a farm or take a virtual field trip to a farm to enliven your study. While you are learning about Tourists at the Pyramids in *Hello 1*, Unit 23, you can take a virtual field trip of Egypt. (See the resource list for links to these sites.)

A word of caution: The web is very democratic - anyone with time to learn how to do it can post a website on anything they like. Though worlds of information are available on the WWW, it's very easy for student (and teacher!) users to get lost or sidetracked. Students should have very clear guidelines regarding on-line web use and be carefully supervised. You can prevent some of this sidetracking as well as access to inappropriate materials by making selected web materials available off-line. To put web material into your machine, download the websites you have selected (copy them to your computer). There are various kinds of storage to help you do this: computer hard drive, zip disks, read-write CD-ROMs or DVDs are available options at this writing. Another reason to providing this kind of access to websites off-line is that in schools access to the Internet through phone lines or other means may be limited or expensive.

Lots of good and bad information alike can be found on the web. So it is up to you, the user, to evaluate what you find on the web to see if it is useful for your teaching and it is important to supervise your students very carefully as they access the Internet at school.

Translation Software. An exciting potential of the computer is as a translator. Computer translators keep improving, though they do not produce polished or trustworthy translations of sentence-level text. You can find dictionaries and translation software available for free on the web. Some of your students may even have hand-held "translators." Some of the free software can do an initial translation from one language to another (though, at this stage, the translation is likely to have many errors). A link to a free, on-line Arabic-English translation dictionary can be found in the resources at the end of this chapter.

Teacher Tools. Free or inexpensive software is also available to help with the many tasks of a teacher: planning lessons; recording, averaging, and analyzing marks; creating activities such as crossword puzzles and "word search" puzzles; and writing tests and quizzes.

On-line Language Learning. On-line programs or CD-ROM language learning programs provide comprehensive tutorials for individuals (e.g. Global English).

Conclusion

Teachers, however, must invest time to learn to use technology effectively and to learn how to teach students to do so. Technology will only provide effective tools for your teaching and your students' learning if you learn to use it well. Use every opportunity you find to learn all you can to make your use of technology in your classroom effective. If you are a beginner, find a course and a partner or tutor to support you. One of the best ways to prepare

yourself to use technology with your students is to begin to use it for your own purposes ie. to write notes and letters, to write lesson plans and seating charts, to keep your grade book, to send messages to friends, family, and co-workers, to find information and illustrations for your lesson plans, to do your university coursework. When you're gaining proficiency in using these tools for yourself, you will be ready to begin helping students to become effective users.

Perhaps the most crucially important skill that must be developed is to learn to recognize good technologies and good software and to reject tools that fail to meet your goals and high standards. This skill is acquired from many hours spent with the tools combined with careful, critical evaluation.

Key Terminology

Clip Art

Files of photos and pictures

Hardware

The computer and equipment

Hypertext

Text that is marked or highlighted so that when you click on it with your mouse, you jump to another text or file or program or web location

Multimedia

Computer software with video, audio, and interactive abilities

Search engine

Software programs that help you search on the Internet

Software

Programs that make the computer work

Web Browser

Programs that give you access to the internet

World Wide Web or Internet

A linked network of computer locations all over the world

Understanding Check

1. Why is computer technology important in teaching primary EFL?
2. What hardware and software are available in your school? What might be available soon?
3. How might one of the following applications improve your instruction and/or your students' learning?
 - Word processing
 - Presentation software
 - Multimedia software
 - Communication software
 - The Internet
4. Plan an activity that uses a computer application designed to help your students meet some of the learning goals for your next EFL unit.

Resources

Print Resources:

Boswood, T., (Ed.). (1999). *New Ways of Using Computers in Language Teaching*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL, Inc.

Cummins, J. & Sayers, D. (1997). *Brave New Schools: Challenging Cultural Illiteracy through Global Learning Networks*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cummins, J. (1998). e-Lective Language Learning: Design of a Computer Assisted Text-based ESL/EFL Learning System. *TESOL Journal*, Spring, 1998.

Egbert, J. & Hanson-Smith, E. (Eds.). (1999). *CALL Environments: Research, Practice, and Critical Issues*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Egyptian Ministry of Education. (1999). *Mubarak and Education: The National Project for Developing Education*. Dalyoub, Egypt: Al-Ahram Commercial Press. May 8, 2001.

Pennington, M. (1996). *The Power of CALL*. Houston, TX: Athelstan.

Roblyer, M., Edwards, J., and Havriluk, M. (1997). *Integrating Educational Technology into Teaching*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Sperling, D. *The Internet Guide for English Language Teachers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Warschauer, M. (1996). *E-Mail for English Teaching*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Web Resources:

Belisle, Ron. E-mail Activities in the ESL Writing Class.
<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Articles/Belisle-Email.html>

Egyptian Farm Photo.
http://www.hunkler.com/egypt/xxx_045.htm

Free On-line Arabic-English Translation Dictionary.
http://dictionary.ajeab.com/idrisidic_2.asp?Site=1&DestLang=Ar&lpcWord=left

Global English (Online Learning).
<http://www.globalenglish.com>

Healey, D. (1998). A Place to Start in Selecting Software. *CAELL Journal* 8:1, winter 1997/98.
http://osu.orst.edu/~healeyd/cj_software_selection.html

Learning Resources for Teachers: Blue Web'n Learning Resources
<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/bluwebn/>

March, Tom. Working the Web for Education: The theory and practice of integrating the Web for learning.

<<http://www.ozline.com/learning/theory.html>>

March, Tom. What is on the Web?: Seven Ways Teachers Can View and Use the Content of the Web.

<<http://www.ozline.com/learning/webtypes.html>>

McCloskey, Mary Lou. 1999. Mary Lou McCloskey's Resource Pages.

<<http://www.mindspring.com/~mlmcc/>>

The Newbury House Online Dictionary.

<http://nhd.heinle.com/>

TESOL CALL-IS Software List Elementary Education Titles.

Compiled by Deborah Healey and Norm Johnson

<http://www.orst.edu/dept/eli/softlist/elementary.html>

Word Processing for Children: Learning Company, Storybook Weaver

<https://www.learningco.com/ecart/cart.asp>

Search Engines:

<http://google.com/>

<http://www.searchengines.com/>

<http://search.egyptweb.com/>

<http://www.egyptsearch.com/>

<http://www.askjeeves.com/>

<http://www.yahoo.com/>

Shareware (free or inexpensive software) for teachers: Win-Shareware.com

<http://www.win-shareware.com/educate.mv>

E-pals:

Pitara Kids Network:

<http://www.pitara.com/community/epals/index.asp>

Thisiswisbech Kids Corner:

http://www.thisiswisbech.co.uk/tiw/kidskorner/epal_join.html

Discover-Net E-pals:

<http://discover-net.net/~mlana/penpalsepals.html>

E-mail around the world:

<http://www.buddyproject.org/teach/default.asp>

Web Browsers:

Microsoft Internet Explorer.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/default.htm>

Netscape Navigator.

<http://www.netscape.com>

Opera.

<http://www.opera.com/>

Summary Handout for Chapter 19:

Using Computer Technology for Language Learning in the Primary Classroom

Why should we use computer technology?

- Access to people worldwide
- Access to rich resources and information
- Access to teaching and learning tools
- Access to interactive activities, literature
- Access to learning tools that provide feedback and progression

What do we educators need to do?

- Be knowledgeable
- Use computer technology with care and good judgment
- Supervise students carefully

What computer technology is available in Egypt?

- Multimedia computers
- Projection tools
- Internet access
- Computer labs

What are five computer applications for primary english classrooms?

1. Word Processing Software
2. Presentation software
3. Multimedia software
4. Communications software
5. The World Wide Web

