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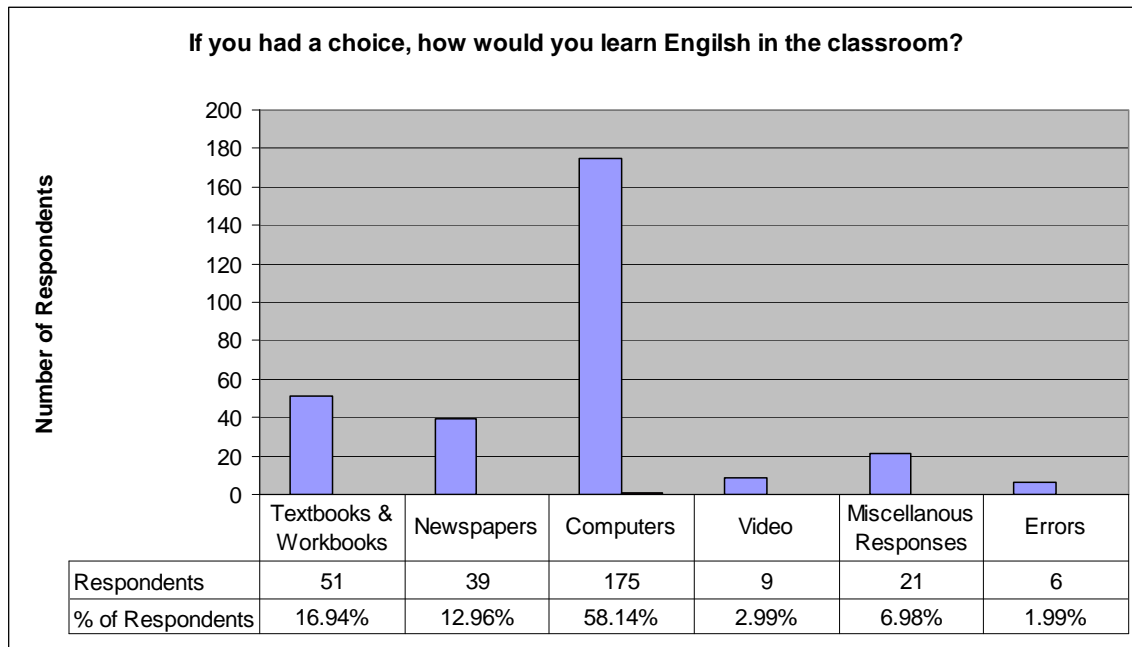
The Advantages and Disadvantages of Technology in an ESL/EFL Classroom

“Sí señora (yes ma’am)”, “Hola. ¿cómo estas? (hello, how are you)”, “¿Estoy bien y usted? (I’m fine, and you?)”, and “Repitan después de mí (repeat after me)” are all Spanish phrases that not too long ago were only heard from a teacher and seen in textbooks by students. Many of us can still remember how it was to sit in a traditional classroom: a few rickety desks scattered about in symmetrical rows facing a worn green chalkboard, the ever astute teacher ready to teach her or his students the lessons for that day, and the stale atmosphere reeking of mildewy air that was our prison for a few hours each day. Who can forget the times when our hands used to hurt from writing countless pages of facts that our teacher was presenting? Those who were left-handed were plagued with the remnants of their hard work in the form of lead residue on the sides of their palms; right-handers, fortunately, were the lucky bunch of the group that did not have to worry about it. Our hands and wrists were the bearers of the brunt of the work; pain was an equal opportunity employer, never discriminating. There was nothing but you, the teacher, your books, the classroom, and the language.

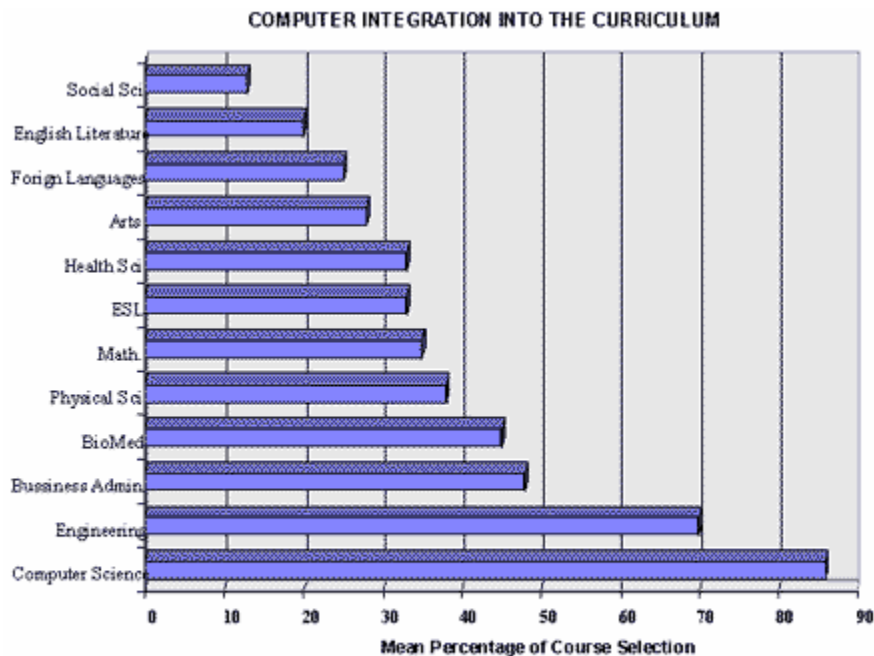
Learning a second language was extremely difficult for those that were not born into a society that utilized two languages. Exposure to a second language was limited because of the lack of technology; near fluency in a second language, then, would have entailed an individual traveling to the country where the target language was spoken fluently, consequently requiring exorbitant amounts of money that unfortunately not many families had. How the times have changed.

No longer are students’ experiences with new languages limited to their textbooks or immediate environment. With the pervasiveness of the internet and the increased awareness of the importance of having technology in a classroom, both teachers and students all over the world are being provided with technological tools that will further accelerate their ability to acquire or teach a second or foreign language. Although incorporating technology with lesson plans and providing sufficient access to new technological resources is proving to be a slow and arduous process, as stated in Dr. Smith’s (1999) essay, *The future of technology in Teaching*, schools are making headway. Ultimately, is technology going to be a hindrance or a welcomed resource in teaching a second or foreign language? To determine this, we must look at a few examples from both sides.

Using technology in ESL/EFL classrooms has many advantages. For one, it is received well by many. In a survey I recently conducted, 61.13% of the three-hundred and one people surveyed said they would prefer to learn English in a classroom via computer or video.



This overwhelming response, which demonstrates the potential acceptance of foreign or second language instruction through the use of technology, was received from Korean students between the ages of nine and sixteen. Although the data was derived from a demographically specific location, there are other indicators that computers are being welcomed by ESL/EFL students all over the world. In Alkahtani's chart in *Teaching ESL reading Using Computers* (1999), data is compiled and organized showing that ESL classrooms rank as the seventh highest (out of 12 subjects) in terms of computers being used as part of the curriculum.



Source: "Understanding information Systems in Higher Education"; 1995

Students all over the world are becoming more technologically savvy. Teachers and parents have caught on to the students' increased awareness and interest in technology and have turned to technology for more educational instruction, subsequently increasing the demand for computers, video projectors, audio players, and other forms of instructional equipment in classrooms. Realizing this trend could positively impact a student's education, school districts around the United States have begun to provide their teachers with the necessary resources. In a 1999 survey conducted by the National Center For Education Statistics (NCES), over 99% of teachers surveyed said they had access to a computer (1999). Out of those surveyed, 39% stated they used computers to generate lesson plans, worksheets, handouts, and other educational materials ("Adult Education", 2005). As previously noted, the interest in using computers and other forms of technology is there; it is just a matter of finding funds to help facilitate the merging of technology and ESL/EFL education.

Another advantage of using technology in ESL/EFL classrooms is cost. Teachers no longer have to rely solely on textbooks and workbooks as their primary sources of instructional material. Over the past several years, prices in technology have decreased. Computer access is no longer limited to the upper echelon of society; almost anyone, including schools, can pick up a computer for less than four-hundred dollars (<http://www.tigerdirect.com/>). Furthermore, computer training workshops for teachers are abundant and cheap. By simply typing in the target words "computer training workshops" in the Google search engine, one will generate over twenty-three million possible matches with the first ten results containing relevant information about actual workshops that are available to teachers. Spending about five minutes surfing through the links, one can see that the cost of a workshop ranges from nothing to a few hundred dollars (price dependent on the length of the workshop, travel costs, materials, etc.). Additionally, ESL/EFL software is cheap when compared to the average price of one textbook, one workbook per student. Below is a chart that shows different ESL/EFL software at various affordable prices:

Name of Software	Price	Store	Link
The New Oxford Picture Dictionary CD-Rom	\$46.44	A1books.com	http://www.a1books.com/
English Now	\$39.95	digitalriver.com	http://www.digitalriver.com/
RosettaStone English Level 1	\$195.00	RosettaStone.com	http://www.rosettastone.com/

Prices taken on October 21st, 2006. Prices may change with time

Moreover, being able to expand teaching resources at a minimal cost has led to the pervasiveness of technology in classrooms. For instance, the cost of Internet service has significantly dropped in the past few years. With the average price of Internet service at an all time low, more and more schools are now allocating funds to new areas such as visual equipment or teacher related sites such as edhelper.com. With video projectors, teachers can conduct classes interactively through sites such as brainpop.com. On brainpop.com, students are taught a lesson by an animated boy and robot. After the lesson is complete, there are different sections that offer questions and answers. Upon answering the question, the animated boy and/or robot respond accordingly; i.e. whether the answer is right or wrong, the animated boy or robot will let you know. Access to sites such as

edhelper.com provides teachers with a much larger tool box from which lesson plans, worksheets, and other creative materials can be produced. On edhelper.com, teachers can create their own worksheets or print up ones that have been previously made. In addition, tests and answers are provided for various lessons (there are hundreds of different worksheets and handouts for teachers of English as a foreign or second language). In short, with technological costs decreasing, it is evident that schools with ESL/EFL programs will diversify their programs making them more appealing to students. Additionally, having a wider variety of instructional delivery will help keep the class interested in what is being taught thus increasing information retention rate, overall program effectiveness and demand for ESL/EFL classes.

Contrary to what has been previously stated, technology in EFL/ESL classrooms does have its disadvantages; one being the assumption that connecting schools to the internet automatically ensures the improvement of a student's educational experience (Rosenbaum, Sawyer, 1999). Technology in schools does not automatically guarantee improved education. A teacher needs to be able to use these tools, i.e. technology, and effectively implement them in the curriculum. Many teachers are not familiar with various computer applications nor are they trained on how to use different forms of technology in the classroom. Consequently, students are not given the best combination of technology and classroom experience. The L2 learners are the ones that suffer in the end. Further research is necessary in order to show how technology can be most effectively utilized.

Another disadvantage from having technology in ESL/EFL classrooms is the compatibility of some software with students. For example, in any ESL/EFL classroom, there are students from a variety of countries. These students range in levels of English proficiency. Software which is designed to target a specific level may be too advanced or too basic for some of the students in the class.

Additionally, ELLs may not be familiar with "English" Internet. According to the Internet World Stats Usage and Population Statistics (IWSUPS), as of September 20th, 2006, 70.3% of the internet can be found in another language besides English (internet stats). Students could have easily access the Internet in their own language never having used English as a tool for surfing the web.

Top Ten Languages Used in the Web (Number of Internet Users by Language)					
TOP TEN LANGUAGES IN THE INTERNET	% of all Internet Users	Internet Users by Language	Internet Penetration by Language	Internet Growth for Language (2000 - 2006)	World Population 2006 Estimate for the Language
<u>English</u>	29.7 %	322,600,837	28.7 %	135.2 %	1,125,664,397
<u>Chinese</u>	13.3 %	144,301,513	10,8 %	346.7 %	1,340,767,863
<u>Japanese</u>	7.9 %	86,300,000	67.2 %	83.3 %	128,389,000
<u>Spanish</u>	7.5 %	81,729,671	18.7 %	231.1 %	437,502,257
<u>German</u>	5.4 %	58,854,682	61.3 %	113.2 %	95,982,043
<u>French</u>	4.6 %	49,660,498	13.0 %	307.1 %	381,193,149

Portuguese	3.1 %	34,064,760	14.8 %	349.6 %	230,846,275
Korean	3.1 %	32,372,000	45.8 %	78.0 %	73,945,860
Italian	2.7 %	28,870,000	48.8 %	118.7 %	59,115,261
Russian	2.2 %	23,700,000	16.5 %	664.5 %	143,682,757
TOP TEN LANGUAGES	79.5 %	863,981,961	21.5 %	166.7 %	4,017,088,863
Rest of World Languages	20.5 %	222,268,942	9.0 %	500.0 %	2,482,608,197
WORLD TOTAL	100.0 %	1,086,250,903	16.7 %	200.9 %	6,499,697,060

Chart taken from the IWSUPS Website.

Having students access the internet during class to check their email or getting the students to use the program for that day's lesson may prove to be quite difficult if they have never used the "English" Internet. Unfortunately in these cases, technology seems to be more of a hindrance than a benefit.

Despite the disadvantages that come with incorporating technology into ESL/EFL classrooms, it is essential to have technology present. No longer are classrooms traditional in the sense that a student's primary tools for success are the teacher, a notebook, and a pencil. Rather, classrooms are equipped or being equipped to deal with the increasing demand of more resources from which an ESL/EFL student may acquire a second or foreign language. Look at the phenomenal leap that technology has made in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, and abundance in the past decade. Furthermore, look at the speed in which the expansion of the English language has occurred since the nineteen fifties. According to David Crystal's *English as a Global Language*, "No other language has spread around the globe so extensively (p.71)." The desire to learn English will not relent anytime soon. Therefore, educators and institutions that teach English to ELLs must adapt to the changes and demands of their clients by providing a wider variety of English language instruction and accessibility; all of which can be done through technology.

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