The Effectiveness of the Use of the computer in Foreign Language Learning in Primary Education


The objective of Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Education is that students develop their communicative competence. In order to achieve that goal, they need to be provided with tasks that reproduce communication in real life.

Thanks to the computer, these tasks become real. The Internet enables students to communicate with people all over the world, using their English for a real purpose. Unconscious learning is fostered since pupils’ attention is focused on communicating their message rather than on the language used; therefore, acquisition is fostered. In addition to that, the multimedia features of the computer facilitate comprehension.

In everyday life the four linguistic skills are not used in an isolated way, they are combined. The integrated-skill approach involves the teaching of the language skills in conjunction to each other. Computers provide simultaneous practice of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For instance, students can listen to a song. Then, they read the lyrics in groups and write a new version of the song by replacing the words at the end of each line with other words that rhyme. Finally, they sing the song.

The methodology used nowadays is centred on the learner. The teacher needs to take into account the students’ needs, interests, previous knowledge and capacities when designing any task. Working with computers allows students to work at their own pace, since computer programmes can be easily adapted to each student by modifying the objectives, instructions or level of the activities. This encourages students’ autonomy and helps them to become independent learners.

Howard Gardner claimed that individuals have at least eight different intelligences that can be developed over a lifetime: mathematic, visual, kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, verbal and naturalist. Traditionally, schools have just focused on the development of linguistic and
mathematic intelligences. Therefore, teachers need to design activities that focus on the eight intelligences, not only to facilitate language acquisition among diverse students, but also to help them realize their full potential.

Computers are connected to a variety of intelligences. Among others, we can mention interpersonal intelligence, since students can communicate with other people and visual intelligence, as the computer provides visual support that facilitates comprehension.

The use of the computer in education generally, and in the teaching of English in particular, has increased at an extraordinary speed. For example, students can employ software designed for the learning of English, word-processors and encyclopaedias.

The software available for language learners includes programmes which teach and test vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation and that enable students to develop the four linguistic skills. These programmes are available on CD-ROMs and on the Internet.

Many computer programmes that are not intended for the language classroom are useful too. The word processor allows pupils to practise their writing skills, making them aware of the importance of care and presentation. Reference CD-ROMs and encyclopaedias can be used to look for information that will be included in projects.

The advantage of using the computer in this way is that students are focused on carrying out a task using the computer rather than thinking about the English they need to use. The language is essential to complete the task, but as they are not consciously thinking about it, acquisition is encouraged.

Computers are an excellent tool for teachers as well, since they are useful to prepare attractive and colourful worksheets. Authoring programmes allow teachers to create exercises that include gap-filling, matching, multiple choice or sequencing activities.

We cannot forget an essential aid of the computer, which is, the internet. It is a system of networks that connects computers around the world. It has revolutionised the way in which people communicate nowadays.

The Internet is an enormous resource of information that can be exploited in many ways. It can be used for research and project work. Students will find not only interesting information but also pictures and photographs that will serve to illustrate their work.

Some sites on the Internet offer interactive exercises that reinforce all aspects of language. This means that when students have completed an activity, their answers will be checked and corrected automatically.

When selecting sites for the English classroom, the teacher must take into consideration several aspects, like the accuracy of the information provided, the relevance of the content for our pupils, the presentation of the web page, and the language level.

Thanks to the e-mail it is possible to interact not only with the computer, but also with other learners around the world, promoting students curiosity about other cultures. According to Stephen
Bax, the classroom walls are falling down. The e-mail can also be used for other purposes, such as correcting exercises, sending tasks to different groups and communicating with other students and the teacher inside and outside the classroom.

The chat and the messenger can be used in the same way as the e-mail. Their advantage is that real-time communication takes place. Besides, the messenger makes it possible to send files.

In order to ensure a responsible and effective use of computers and the Internet, it is convenient to establish some rules for the use of computers, making sure that students know what will happen if they disobey. The teacher must visit a site before using it in class, planning the work which will be carried out carefully so that it doesn’t become a simple time-filler. Before working with computers, the teacher must pre-teach any necessary vocabulary and explain pupils the purpose of computer activities.

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the computer is a valuable resource of foreign languages and the use of both the internet and the computer have many advantages, since it is extremely attractive and motivating for pupils. Besides, most students enjoy using them outside the classroom and are familiar with them and finally, this will create a pleasant classroom atmosphere.

Bibliografía