

How computers helped us to teach English

컴퓨터를 이용한 영어학습방법

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, an experience of cooperation between different departments in College is described. Some useful English drills had been done on computers and they are more interesting, easier and faster than an ordinary paper-and-pencil test. Both the teacher and the students had found advantages in using this.

Many departments in Yong-In Technical College teach computer science. The students study computer programming, different applications programs, operational systems, etc. Therefore programming is not too easy, especially for some students, they are still highly motivated in it because it is their major. It is very inviting to use the interest in computers, which exists for having an additional stimulus to their learning of English.

Because of the big progress in multimedia and a lot of options to study English using multimedia programs on CD-ROM's, many people think of CALL (Computer Assistant Language Learning) mostly in connection with these type of programs. If we imagine a computer-language lab, where students are busy with multimedia programs, which possesses everything: sound, moving pictures, questions, answers and many other interesting things, why in this case do the students need a teacher? It will be enough if only they decide to study English seriously by themselves. We are talking about class practice: a teacher and students. In this situation, we should use something more appropriate, that is better connected with the everyday class routine.

If we recall the methods of teaching English nowadays, we can say they have one thing in common: the ultimate aim is to teach students conversation. To make students feel easily, to overcome their embarrassments, teachers mostly try to be more understand. Usually teachers even do not want to correct the students' mistakes, because after the correction, even if it has been done in a friendly way, people mostly become speechless, could not say the other word. In that way, the teacher and the students often ignore grammar rules. Therefore, the students sometimes make so many grammar mistakes in their speech that they often become difficult to understand and they cannot communicate effectively.

Grammar and vocabulary in the classroom

Because of psychological differences which exist among the people, they study English in different ways. Some of the learners even do not need any grammar explanations; they just adopt the grammar rules using their own (maybe even unknown for them) inner rules. We can say that the grammar explanations are not always necessary, but it needless to say that the grammar skills are very important. How can students achieve better results in grammar? The answer is that they should practice more and the teacher is responsible for providing effective work.

To check the student's knowledge, the concerned teacher would not only check the homework, but also prepare the different tests. They may be in the special forms with the filling in the blanks, or just on the ordinary sheets

of paper. There are three problems with those tests: they are boring, difficult to check and easy to cheat.

Some teachers who practice conversation approaches for teaching English intend not to teach vocabulary to students on purpose. They think students would absorb vocabulary in their everyday English practice. It is good, especially because all the words are in the context in this way. However, is it enough? It may be true, if only the student lives in an English-speaking environment and has language interaction opportunities every day (conversation, announcements, radio, TV, signs on the streets). In the situations, when the student takes an English class, staying in his native country, he needs a constant exercise to enhance his vocabulary. If an English textbook introduces vocabulary, it is better, because in this case students know contextual meanings of the words. If the student practices with the vocabulary regularly, he will be more confident about the texts, he can follow the main ideas in the book, and he will understand the grammar explanations better. Again, how to check? We can just repeat the objection: tests are boring, difficult to check and easy to cheat.

Grammar and vocabulary in computer lab

Why couldn't we entrust computers with providing the dull, recurring grammar and vocabulary drills? Computers are very efficient and uncomplaining. Unlike teachers, they never get sick and tired of endless exercises. It is up to a teacher to give the students the chance to repeat the test until it is done (it depends on the type of the test). We do not want to be too naive to think we can completely avoid cheating. On computers, however, cheating is much more difficult, because all questions and answers are randomized.

As an example one of the screens in the grammar drills exercise, you can see on picture⁽¹⁾.

Picture 1. The screen in a grammar-drill program "Multiple choice"

In this program, the student has to choose a proper option among the number of choices (the program allows to have up to nine). Student reads the question, moves cursor up and down to choose an appropriate answer and then press "Enter." After that, he will see either a red or a green frame on the screen. The last means a good answer. The program shows also the number of the question (upper left corner) and the time left (upper right corner).

An example of the screen of vocabulary test is on the picture 2 (you can fill in up to 500 lexemes). This test is intended to evaluate students' recognizing vocabulary. Students should choose the appropriate translation among the other ten. Doing this test student can begin with the easiest for him English word, moving cursor up and down and pressing "Enter" and find a Korean equivalent. If he gives a proper choice, the pair of words disappears. If the choice

was wrong, the program records a mistake.

Picture 2. The screen in a vocabulary - drill program

These exercise students do with joy. It looks like a computer game and as we were told, our students know vocabulary fairly well. Everyone likes to do an exercise in which he is good!

A team of Computer Science and English teachers in Moscow had written these two programs⁽¹⁾. The programs were written under DOS, and it is easy to "fill" them up with any grammar exercises and any vocabulary. An approach like that was described in⁽¹⁾. It has been undeservedly forgotten during the last few years. Teachers still have piles of paper to check, and they mostly can prepare only one test variant using a copy machine.

We can also say that the situation in a classroom during the computer test is very different. The teacher is more relaxed, because he knows it is almost impossible for students to cheat. He also must be happy because instead of long marking in the case of a "paper test" he is just going to get a score from a computer, which comes out right after finishing the test. Eventually students should also appreciate the possibility of working independently and getting an accurate grade.

In comparison to the Moscow students, Korean students do the exercise almost simultaneously and it is easier to manage. They willingly explain the rules of the test to their classmates, and that makes the teacher to be not so busy.

"Utopia, would have said the reader, -where could we get so many computers to have such the tests? No one school could afford itself to have a computer lab just for English. It is too expensive. We have not enough money." Computers are expensive, that is true. However, what is better than money is cooperation. We had an example of such good cooperation between the English department and the department of Electronics during last two terms. The department of Electronics provided our English learners with their computer lab with up to 40 Pentiums and all the necessary assistance. Mostly due to this, we could do our midterm and final tests easily, and we had time to have an oral test.

In Korea nowadays, many institutions deal with CALL, CAT (Computer Adaptive Testing), CALT (the computer version of TOEFL)⁽³⁾. An investigation⁽⁴⁾ revealed that there is strong correlation between the results of computer testing with ones of traditional pencil-and-pen test.

The teachers of the departments, which teach Computer Science together with the English teachers, could also consider the possibilities of giving individual projects to the students. Students can create their own testing programs and then successfully try them studying English.

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