

# Multimedia in Foreign Language Learning

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**Abstract:** Computer technology and Internet are inevitable new media in education methodology. Still, the central role in teaching belongs to humans. The power of Internet lies in offering authentic materials, software, education plans, list of exams, literature, etc. to schools, universities, and institutions all over the world but under the same conditions. Next to its commercial importance, it is seen as pedagogical tool for either the independent research or teamwork.

The paper brings out positive and negative effects of new technology and its implementation in foreign language

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever, advancements in technology influence our jobs, education, scientific development, market and political cooperations, communications, etc. Information and communication technologies have entered every aspect of our lives. Computers are no longer intended for the selected few since they exist in all forms of contemporary life, and thus including educational institutions as well.

Every day, we face the infinity of information that needs to be selected among many and then appropriately used. Computer technology has become a part of every-day activities in such an amount that present generations must be computer literate no matter what his/her expert of scientific field might be. Such a situation introduces an idea of on-line web-based curricula in order to respond to increasing demands from society and industry the same.

In spite of the fact that computers are being used for education purposes for the past decades, their usage still does not suffice.

Introduction of Internet speeds up the usage of new technologies even more and reconsiders the social role of educational institutions. According to some research done by the American Technology Evaluation Office (Wellburn, 1996), the technology should be one of the major factors for bridging over larger and larger gap between schools and society. Online environments and the use of the Web have been seen as an educational panacea for providing students with skills such as online communication, discussion and negotiation of meaning.

The new technology helps the teacher with the educational process, presents new possibilities of creative work and two way communication, and furthermore presents teachers with a challenge to provide an active participation of all students.

Browsers with interesting graphical designs, enable key word search for not only textual pages, but

learning. Besides for the lessons learning, the idea of information literacy maintains crucial position in education. The new technology demands investment of time, effort, money, and self-education, so that the principal question remains: Are we ready for new type of education in order to offer better teaching, more interesting lessons and more importantly, to prepare new generations for future challenges?

also search for pictures and sounds as well. Usage of e-mails also enables active participation in discussion lists where all participants can discuss, give their opinions or ask for help. Data transfer permits transmission of pictures, sounds, texts or programs needed for the classroom work. Electronic newspapers and search of distant libraries are also different and exciting ways of getting required information.

Today, computer technology and Internet need to be seen as unavoidable teaching materials that provide students with new ways of communication, different ways to access the authentic materials, initiative to individual research and also to the individual and team work. The main question today is no longer 'Does the needed technology exist?' but rather 'Are the educators ready for the new educational era, for further self education and for putting more effort and time in their preparations so that they can offer more interesting lessons and more importantly, to prepare present generations for future challenges?'

## II. MULTIMEDIA USAGE IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

Multimedia can be used for teaching different topics in math, informatics, foreign language learning, biology, chemistry, etc. There is an immense quantity of web pages with already made materials that can be used in the classroom and that cover almost all subjects covered in primary and secondary schools, as well as the materials for the youngest and the oldest students as well. So, for example, if you visit FunBrain.com, Quia, GetSmarter.org and similar sites, you will find all sorts of exercises, drills, games, tests, and explanations that can be used in the classroom. The pages offer different materials for students, according to their age group, but also for teachers and parents.

Many conferences and associations concerning this field, speak about the importance of the new technology usage in the educational process. Here we

can mention only some like Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO), European Association for Computer Assisted Learning (EUROCALL), Foreign Language Learning Education and Technology (FLEAT), International Association for Language Learning and Teaching (IALL).

Teachers' reaction to the Internet usage varies from those who strongly oppose it as a place with too much, chaotically organized information, to those who uncritically embrace it. Both reactions produce equally negative results and should be changed. In spite of the great potentials that Internet offers in the language classroom, its effectiveness depends on the way both teachers and students exploit it.

It has been proved that students generally enjoy working with computers, and this fact should be used to motivate them during learning process. They should be thought how to use Internet as a learning material as once they were thought how to use books.

### III. METHODOLOGY OF MULTIMEDIA SYSTEMS

Multimedia as teaching material presents a new method in educational process in Croatia's schools. These educational packages consist of different forms of knowledge. Depending on their design, they can be used for several class periods, for one semester or for even an entire school year. On one hand, these packages make teachers' job easier, especially for the teachers working in dislocated schools, but on the other hand, they require special computer equipment, computer literacy of teachers as well as students, and great motivation.

Multimedia packages combine different thematic areas: the main theme, i.e., the context on which the language learning is based upon, grammar, written and spoken communication. Teachers also need to include multimedia packages in their lesson micro plans, and then decide on the class type, plan the topic and domain of the material that will be covered, time needed to complete the assignments, the main objectives of the class, testing, and other.

Usage of the multimedia packages requires certain teaching aims to be satisfied:

- ✎ educational – acquisition of the new;
- ✎ behavioral – learning good manners, communication, motivation, self-perception, self-responsibility;
- ✎ functional – fine-tuning of reasoning, practicing memorizing, observing, and drawing skills.

Contemporary methodology has an accent on the usage of different forms of teaching believing that it brings the best effects, and thus suggests the combination of frontal, group, pair and individual work. If multimedia is adequately included in such a teaching, it gives extremely good results.

#### A. Strategies

Anita Wenden defines learning strategies as mental steps that learners use to learn a new language and regulate efforts to do so. She also believes that there are

only two main kinds of learning strategies that are distinguished on the basis of their function in learning:

- ✎ Cognitive strategies – steps taken to process linguistic and sociolinguistic content and they include selecting information from incoming data, comprehending it, storing it, and retrieving it for the use;
- ✎ Self-management strategies – steps taken to oversee and manage learning and they include planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Julika Matravers however makes a different division and uses six kinds of strategies that are used in teaching process:

- ✎ Cognitive apprenticeship – watching an expert in action and asking questions;
- ✎ Successive refinement – the learning material is explained in steps with gradual addition of details;
- ✎ Practice – presentation of a problem that needs to be solved;
- ✎ Demonstration – presentation of example;
- ✎ Socratic hinting – placing the user in a specific frame of mind by providing short reminders or questions;
- ✎ Analogue reasoning – presenting a different viewpoint of a situation.

The strategy is selected according to the subject area and has to be supported by the interface used in the classroom.

### IV. MULTIMEDIA IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Information and communication technologies are probably the most used technologies for foreign language teaching. There is probably no teacher who, next to the standard text books, does not bring authentic materials, like city maps, newspaper articles, book reviews, recipes, poems, etc., to his/her classroom. All of these and even more can be found on the Internet.

Just by using search engines on the web, one can access far away libraries, find the on-line magazines that cover specific topics, send messages, discuss problems, or ask for help. This shows that the new technology is not only a technical helping tool, but an educationally rich source for the teachers and their students.

The web pages that offer different activities for students are considered to be very valuable as a source for different:

- ✎ *grammar exercises*
- ✎ *comprehension reading exercises*
- ✎ *writing of abstracts and letters*
- ✎ *solving puzzles*
- ✎ *vocabulary learning through recipes, fashion and sport articles*
- ✎ *information on studying abroad*
- ✎ *searching for jobs or for a certain product*
- ✎ *translation between languages and many more.*

In this way, students practice their writing skills, they search for the things of their own interest and thus learning becomes more fun. Except for the primary aim,

which is learning foreign language, students are also working on their computer skills and new technology usage.

As German philosopher, Alexander von Humboldt has noticed 'A language cannot be taught. One can only create conditions for learning to take place.' and by using multimedia, one certainly creates such conditions.

All nine approaches to language teaching that were used through out the history, grammar-translation approach, direct approach, reading approach, audiolingualism, situational approach, cognitive approach, affective-humanistic approach, comprehension-based approach, and communicative approach are only brought together in multimedia and web usage. This is something that every teacher needs to have in mind when pondering over using multimedia or not.

#### A. Examples of Multimedia on WWW

Learning with the help of multimedia packages is no longer a one-way process, but rather a dialog among the participants. Most often, students use multimedia individually or in pairs, in the classroom, and also at home. Working with such packages, students systematize lessons, revise through games, and logically connect learning materials with real life situations.

Next to the multimedia packages on CD-ROMs or floppy discs, variety of exercises, drills and examples can be found on the Internet, usually under the Education category. Except for the main portals ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com), [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com), ...) with Education as a subcategory, there are also direct links to specialized pages for foreign language learning, like Education Resources Website (<http://www.edufind.com/>), Language on the Web (<http://www.languages-on-the-web.com>), On-line Dictionaries (<http://www.yourdictionary.com>), Foreign Language Resources on the Web (<http://www.itp.berkeley.edu/~thorne/HumanResources.html>), and many others.

There are multimedia packages intended for early learning (up to ten year old ones) that offer story telling, song listening, and game playing which are more appropriate forms of learning for that age group. CD-ROMs and Web pages (<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Dictionary.html>, <http://www.pdictionary.com>) with picture dictionaries can also be found and used for these learners. Multimedia packages for older learners differ in their content and presentation, but nevertheless, offer dynamical, interesting, multimedia environment, with different topics to cover, many types of exercises and drills, tests, grammatical rules explained and used on several levels, and last but not the least, feedback to the user about his progress.

## V. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Different criteria are mentioned throughout the literature concerning the evaluation of multimedia packages. Among them, there are few that can be viewed

as the major ones that need to be taken into consideration so that their form, strategy and procedures make a system that can be employed in education. According to Richard and Janice Schreck three major evaluations must take place:

- ✎ evaluation of content and instructional presentation;
- ✎ evaluation of the smoothness of the learning experience;
- ✎ evaluation of the courseware's value in the curriculum.

Multimedia interfaces for educational systems also have to be adjusted to the user – student, concerning his/her individual needs, already obtained results, testing and topics. Criteria that every interface needs to satisfy are:

- ✎ cognitive load and style which include consistency, abstraction, fidelity, and flexibility;
- ✎ supportiveness which is a right level of feedback or help for the user to feel comfortable with the program;
- ✎ acceptability which refers to the ability of the system to be simple to use, not to cause tiredness, frustration or any discomfort.

Multimedia interfaces that are used for educational purposes are aimed toward the user who needs to efficiently complete his/her assignment. So, next to the already mentioned criteria, the interface must support the learning process in a way that the user interface is seen as the student interface since the context of interaction between a computer and a student is a different one of the interaction between a computer and a user.

#### A. Example of Multimedia Package on CD-ROM

Multimedia Package *Learn to Speak French/English* is one of multimedia packages that unify thematic units with dynamic and static pictures and sounds. Next to lessons, it offers grammar exercises, vocabulary drills, tests, grammar rules, sound recordings, listening of the native speaker with the possibility of a feed-back.

Students usually use these packages individually or in pairs, outside the classroom area. By working on such multimedia package, the student systemizes lessons, reviews through the game, establishes new logical connections between the learned material and real life situation and thus justifies the teacher's investment of time and effort.

There are, also, multimedia packages for early language acquisition (up to 10 years) that enable story writing, game playing, and song listening.

Some CD-ROMs have picture dictionaries with animations (movement and sound), that children can use individually, in pairs or in group. Such CD is Picture Dictionary CD-ROM.

#### B. Personalization of Multimedia Packages

One of the criteria of multimedia package is the ability to personalize it. Since the central role belongs to

a student as an individual, it is important to be able to adopt the program for his/her personal needs. The student can repeat exercises at his/her own will, move through the program at his/her own pace and according to his/her interests, broaden the lesson using links and additional texts, evaluate him/herself through recording of his/her own speech, check the test results or exit the program in every moment. This way, learning becomes a two-way communication instead of one-way as it used to be.

The package can be placed on web-site of the specific class, together with the links to other similar packages.

## VI. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The Internet is only one of the possible uses of computer technology but is still the most disputed and the most praised one. For some, it is a confirmation of the dominance of American ideas, and for others, a victory of globalization and free market. Some emphasize a user and his/her writes, and some emphasize the idea that the Internet is leading us towards alienation and communication breakdown. We often hear about the variety of easily accessible information and knowledge, but also about unsatisfactory general culture and lack of education.

We find similar reactions concerning the Internet usage in the process of education. Some of the advantages that are usually given as a vote for using Internet are:

- ✎ 24 hour access to materials;
- ✎ all data can be easily changed, edited or added;
- ✎ data can be exchanged and compared among different users;
- ✎ learning is with more enthusiasm that leads to faster memorizing of new materials;
- ✎ communication can be led outside the space and time that involves school as a central learning place;
- ✎ exercises and drills are adjusted to different levels of knowledge;
- ✎ developing of new technology usage skills;
- ✎ developing skills for individual research and team work;
- ✎ acquisition of social awareness;

Of course, there are at the same time disadvantages that we should be aware of and that we should keep in mind when preparing the Internet materials for the classroom usage:

- ✎ lack of a person in charge of the information we find on the Internet;
- ✎ easy access to unsuitable content;
- ✎ surfing the web during and after the class time for the materials not connected with the learning process;
- ✎ virus threat.

In spite of these negative sides of the Internet usage, they should not be seen as a threat to using it at all. Teachers should have a central role here and with his/her

choice of decisions use new technologies and Internet to enrich teaching process in multiple ways.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Internet and Web provide new forms of communication and thus bring many possibilities, but also make their demands for permanent education, usage in classroom, cultural spreading, scientific education and economic development. The new technology has to be seen as a possibility of a new kind of communication and as a help to a teacher whose role stays irreplaceable.

Teachers should be placed in the role of facilitator whose task is to develop and maintain supportive class atmosphere. They will always be the ones who decide, direct, explain, connect old with the new, recognize nonverbal communication, and give moral support. Communication between a teacher and a student, and among students themselves, must not be lost. That is why it is important to adequately use technology and Internet in the classroom and make sure that alienation does not take place at any cost. Directed and wisely managed teaching should only profit by the use of computer technology.

The ability of multimedia packages to motivate students should be used to do exactly that. They can only be seen as the helping tool for the classical teaching process, and the variety and flexibility that they offer should be used to bring out the best that students can give.

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