

Attitudes of EFL students towards using computers in learning English

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Keywords: Attitudes, EFL, Computer, Learning English, Technology.

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Abstract

The use of computers in classrooms is becoming more popular nowadays, especially when the world witnesses an enormous revolution in the field of technology. This research seeks answers for the following questions: 1- Does using computers influence the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language positively or negatively? 2- Does the positive or

negative attitude toward using computer in learning English as a foreign language vary according to sex and age of the students?

To achieve the goals of the study, a questionnaire was distributed to the subjects of this study. This questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part included six items which dealt with personal information questions. The second part consisted of seven items concerned with students' attitudes toward using computer in learning English as a foreign language. These 13 items aimed to elicit whether the students think that using computers in learning enriched their learning process and made it easier or it had no effect on them. The population of this study was a number of EFL students at Madaba public schools-Jordan.

The sample of the study was 100 students. They were divided into 50 males (25 from 1st secondary. grade and 25 from 7th grade) and 50 females (25 from 1st secondary. grade and 25 from 7th grade). All of these informants were native speakers of Jordanian Arabic.

The findings of this study reveal that computer-assisted English language lessons have positive effect on the 7th grade students' attitudes to some extent. Meanwhile, it was found that older students are more likely to have a positive orientation and consciousness of the benefits of using computers in learning.

We can conclude that a wide range of students learning English language have a positive attitude toward using computers in learning English as a foreign language in the classroom. Concerning age, it was quite clear that the older the age is the more positive tendency students have toward using computer in language learning.

Introduction

As the world enters an increasingly digital age, computers become the most important technological media especially in the field of language learning and teaching. This is because computers are considered as a tool that open up opportunities for learning and enable us to access ideas and information from diverse sources, to extend ideas and information through processing, manipulating, analyzing material in different multimedia forms, and to share ideas and information across local, national, and international network. Janada, R. (2009), reported

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that sophomore students, who took their Speech Communication for one semester using the Digital Computerized Laboratory in listening audio materials and recording their voices, found it more interesting to use CALL and would want to spend more time in the laboratory than in the classrooms.

It was reported that using computers in the classroom is very important for both teachers and learners since computers can handle a lot of activities and carry out programmed functions at amazing speed. In addition, they can check exercises after students are done, move students gradually from easier to more difficult tasks according to their levels. The computers can stimulate, drill or explain a certain task when students fail to do it successfully (Hoffman, 1996) quoted in AlKahtani (1999).

Krajka (2000), argues that since most of the internet content is in English, the teachers of English gain access to the enormous variety of authentic materials relating to all fields of life. He adds that the benefits of on-line instruction are that they provide recency to the classroom, because students can experience problems or read about issues which relate to the present day.

Son (2002), mentions three main components in CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) classroom: the learner, the teacher, and the computer. They are complementary to each other. The learner who best perceives how CALL works. The teacher is being asked to be familiar with the new technology and teaching methodology. He recommends that "For the effective use of CALL in the classroom, the teacher needs to have a leading role in the team work and encourage other players in the team to do their best". The roles of the teacher lie in the language classroom: tutor, guide or facilitator. The teacher in CALL needs to act as a CALL observer, designer, implementer, and evaluator.

Boswood, (Ed) (1997), reports that it is the teachers who must play a special role with their pedagogical responsibility. They should not only familiarize themselves with the new technology, but they should also develop new strategies for coping with the unforeseen masses of data.

Alkahtani (1999), concludes, little has been achieved on computer integration into ESL curricula and ESL reading in particular. Today's teachers cannot let technological revolution

pass by without using it to serve their language teaching goals. Since teachers seek to help their students become independent learners, computer programs are very useful for teachers as well as students to achieve that goal.

Using computers while learning English can facilitate the role of the teacher to enhance his students' skills to function well in situations which involve reading, writing, listening and speaking. Mc Nabb (2005), supported such an idea by setting forward two hypothesis concerning using the software data: Firstly, reading digital texts may positively support vocabulary building in context and expand students' lexicon. Another hypothesis is that use of the internet for guided reading may engage students more than reading print.

Krajka (2000), assures that writing instructions should be enriched with the internet components in order to provide students with choice, variety, authenticity, and recency. What is more, the activities don't develop writing solely, but integrate all skills (reading, vocabulary work, speaking/sharing with the class, listening to others).

Review of Related Literature

A number of studies have focused on the impact of computer technologies in the learning environment of classrooms including the learning activities which take place in classroom, and the teaching and learning strategies used to facilitate them.

Researches have shown that children who use computers with supporting activities that reinforce the major objectives of the programmes have significantly greater developmental gains when compared to children without computer experiences in similar classrooms-gains in intelligence, nonverbal skills, structural knowledge, long term memory, manual dexterity, verbal skills, problem solving abstraction, and conceptual skills (Haugland,1992) quoted in Haugland (2000).

A study researched the effects on students' motivation of using computers for writing and communication in the language classroom. It was found that the students overall had positive

attitudes towards using computers and that these attitudes were consistent across a number of variables, including gender typing skills, and access to computers at home.

Tanguay (1997), states that there is a growing sense that the Internet is becoming more and more important for the teachers' professional careers: what they can expect in the years to come, and how they can prepare themselves as English teachers in the digital age. He believes that digitalization increases student-centeredness. "If a student writes a digitalized document, you as a teacher can add notes to the document just as you can do to the regular paper document. The difference is that the student can then click on your digitalized notes e.g. "use present perfect tense" which takes him to an interactive, multimedia lesson teaching him about the present perfect tense."

In addition, digitalization removes geographical barriers and saves time. Teachers and students could conduct an English lesson via video conference from their homes and offices and save much time.

Another benefit for digitalization is that it brings like minds together. There are people in the world who are teaching the same kinds of classes you teach, have similar students and similar difficulties and problems. The Internet makes it possible for you meet, communicate, and work on projects together with them.

Garrett (1988), discusses the issue of using computers in foreign language education. He states that there is a great deal of disagreement about computers' value in language teaching . He adds that although some teachers are enthusiastic, there are many who are skeptical or even hostile to the whole idea.

Xie (2000), reports that although some uncertainty and skepticism exists, the use of computer in classroom instruction is gaining immense popularity today. Computers have become a necessity for a student. He continues to say that despite the controversies about the usefulness fusing computers in teaching and learning, one important advantage of using computers is convenience since multimedia language learning programmes provide texts, sounds, images and interactive drills. With the help of computers, software and internet, learners can now study language anywhere and anytime.

CALL, as Chepelle, C. and Jamieson, J. (1986) define it, is the use of computers in a teaching program, provides fertile ground for innovative and highly creative thinking. CALL is good for motivating students to study English. They are anxious to use computers for they may be tired of traditional English classes and interested in a new style of learning. Perhaps when they use computers, they will feel that they can master and study English with their own learning styles and see the results of their learning. Students may be willing to spend more hours and do more exercises on a computer than on paper. Students also have access to various types of aids including dictionaries, pictures, and voice recordings.

A question to be raised here is that, what is the role of an English teacher in the digital age?

In general, Computers provide a means of extending the effectiveness of our capabilities. However, just like any other machines, without the human input and control they are useless. Computers are also different from the other pieces of equipment used in language teaching and learning such as tape recorders and videos. The computer has a unique ability to interact with the learner. It gives individual attention to the student.

Ray, K and J, Day (1998), suggests some of the advantages of the electronic sources: "electronic information sources are often faster than consulting print indexes, and they are more straight forward when wishing to use combinations of keywords. They open up the possibility of searching multiple files at one time; they are updated more often than printed tools. One main advantage, especially to distance learners or those with limited time to access the library, is there availability form outside the library by dial-up access."

Objectives

This paper aims at investigating the attitudes of EFL students towards using computers in the process of learning. The study is trying to find out answers for the following questions:

1. Does using computers influence students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language positively or negatively?
2. Does the positive or negative attitude toward using computer in learning English as a foreign language vary according to sex and age of the students?

Significance of the study

This study is significant because it pays attention to media and technology in education. With respect to media, there are many issues of concern to students, parents, educators, governments and society at large. For example, important questions are asked about the effects of different media on cognitive and moral development of EFL students.

With respect to technology, people want to know whether various new technologies are more effective for teaching and learning than more traditional classroom approaches, whether some technologies are more motivating than others, or at the very least, whether technologies can be used to increase access or reduce costs within education.

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Methodology

This section presents a description of the instrument employed to elicit data as well as a description of the population and the area where the study was conducted. It also specifies the procedures which were followed to carry out this study.

- Population and subjects

The sample of this study consisted of 100 Jordanian subjects who were made up of 50 males (25 from 1st secondary. grade and 25 from 7th grade) and 50 females (25 from 1st secondary. grade and 25 from 7th grade). It should also be noted that the respondents were from Madaba public schools. Taking into consideration from the very beginning gender and age differences. The population of this study was a number of EFL students at Madaba public schools in Jordan. All of these informants were native speakers of Jordanian Arabic.

-Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed to students and it was the main tool of the study since it provided the researchers with data related to the students' actual attitudes towards using computers while learning English as a foreign language.

This questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part included six items which dealt with personal information questions. The second part consisted of seven items concerned with students' attitudes toward using computer in learning English as a foreign language. As a result, these 13 items aimed to elicit whether the students think that using computers in learning enriched their learning process and made it easier or it had no effect on them.

The subjects were asked about their gender and age to see whether these variables had an impact on their attitudes towards using computer while learning English as a foreign language.

-Procedures

The researchers distributed the questionnaire to the sample. The subjects of this study were asked to provide the suitable answers to the items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was read to the subjects and some of the items were explained in order to guarantee that the subjects understood all the items, so that they could give the right answers.

Discussion and Results

After conducting this piece of research, it is important to know the real attitudes of students towards using computers in learning. To make the discussion convenient, the students' responses were tabulated in two tables to make it easy to read them and come up with clear results. As mentioned previously, the data will be analyzed in terms of the age and sex variables, i.e. Does the positive or negative attitude toward using computer in learning English as a foreign language vary according to sex and age of the students?

Since the students' age is closely related to their grade, we preferred to classify them according to grade, which more or less means their ages.

Questions/items	Answer	7 th grade (13 years old)		1 st sec. grade (17 years old)		Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
1-Do you have a computer at home?	yes	10%	11%	18%	20%	59%
	no	15%	14%	7%	5%	41%
2- If your answer for the previous question was yes, how often do you use it?	1-2	3%	2%	2%	1%	9%
	3-5	14%	14%	4%	3%	35%
	6-10	7%	9%	11%	14%	41%
	10 and over	1%	0%	8%	7%	16%
3- Classify yourself in typing	Weak	14%	12%	2%	3%	31%
	Good	4%	8%	4%	5%	21%
	Very good	5%	4%	6%	7%	22%
	Excellent	2%	1%	13%	10%	26%

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4- What do you think of yourself in terms of using computers?	Weak	7%	6%	7%	8%	15%
	Good	10%	8%	6%	6%	33%
	Very good	4%	7%	7%	7%	29%
	Excellent	4%	4%	5%	4%	23%
5- Have you ever used computers for sending or receiving e-mails?	Always	4%	3%	5%	6%	18%
	Often	4%	2%	7%	4%	17%
	Rarely	12%	14%	9%	11%	46%
	never	7%	6%	4%	4%	21%
6- Have you ever used computers for searching on the internet?	Always	0%	2%	9%	8%	19%
	Often	6%	5%	10%	8%	29%
	Rarely	9%	11%	5%	7%	32%
	never	10%	7%	1%	2%	20%

Table (1) Familiarity with computers:

Regarding table 1 which deals with the students' familiarity with computers and their uses. It was found that the students' responses on the items are different, so it was necessary to have their percentages.

- 1- A glance at the first question, it was found that 59% of the subjects have computers at their homes. The increasingly use of computers is relatively affected by students' age or grade. This may mean that by growing up, students become more and more conscious of the uses and advantages of computers. Concerning the sex variable, it can be noticed that there is no significant variation between males and females which reflects the mutual awareness of benefits gained from using computers.
- 2- Taking the second item into consideration, we can notice that most students in the 7th grade use computers 5 hours or less per week. On the other hand, most students in the 1st secondary grade use computers 10 hours per week. Again, this result emphasizes the previously mentioned idea that children age affects using computers.
- 3- Considering the third item, it is clear that the ability of typing vary greatly according to students' age; as aged students are as competent in typing they are.

- 4- As for the fourth item, it is obvious that the students proficiency in using computers has no relation with their age as well as sex.
- 5- In favour of item five, it has been found that students rarely use computers for sending or receiving e-mails showing no relationship with age. Yet, the majority of students tend not to use computers in sending or receiving e-mails.
- 6- Having a look at the last question, it is really important to conclude that students tendency to use computers for searching on the internet increased relatively with their age.

Table (2) Attitudes towards using computers in learning English:

Items	answer	7 th grade		1 st sec. grade		Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
1- I do my work easily on the computer.	Strongly agree	2%	1%	12%	10%	25%
	Agree	5%	2%	9%	11%	27%
	Disagree	12%	10%	3%	4%	29%
	Strongly disagree	6%	12%	1%	0%	19%
2- Using the computer while doing activities saves time.	Strongly agree	0%	2%	13%	11%	26%
	Agree	4%	3%	8%	9%	24%
	Disagree	11%	8%	2%	3%	24%

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	Strongly disagree	10%	12%	1%	2%	25%
3- I prefer using the computer to enhance my speaking skills.	Strongly agree	2%	3%	15%	17%	37%
	Agree	4%	6%	7%	5%	22%
	Disagree	10%	11%	3%	2%	26%
	Strongly disagree	9%	5%	0%	1%	15%
4- Using e-mail keeps me in touch with new aspects related to English language.	Strongly agree	1%	0%	20%	19%	40%
	Agree	5%	3%	2%	4%	14%
	Disagree	11%	7%	2%	1%	21%
	Strongly disagree	8%	15%	1%	0%	24%
5- I enjoy using the computer while learning English.	Strongly agree	0%	3%	10%	12%	25%
	Agree	2%	1%	6%	8%	17%
	Disagree	6%	10%	4%	3%	23%
	Strongly disagree	17%	11%	5%	2%	35%
6- I feel that using computers in learning increases my creativity	Strongly agree	1%	7%	10%	12%	30%
	Agree	0%	1%	9%	7%	17%
	Disagree	22%	12%	2%	3%	39%
	Strongly disagree	2%	5%	4%	3%	14%
7- I learn English easily when using the computer	Strongly agree	4%	5%	11%	13%	33%
	Agree	2%	5%	9%	10%	26%
	Disagree	9%	3%	4%	1%	17%
	Strongly disagree	10%	12%	1%	0%	23%

Concerning table 2 which shows the students' attitudes towards using computers in learning English as a foreign language, it was found that:

- 1- Most students in the 1st secondary school prefer to use computers because it is easy for them to do their works with than using papers. However, 7th grade students show little interest in using computers while doing their homeworks.
- 2- Many students appreciate the use of computers in doing their activities because they save their time. No clear evidence that there were differences between grades as well as sex regarding the profitability of computers.

- 3- This item shows the importance of using computers while learning English as a foreign language because the majority of the subjects especially the 1st secondary school students agreed on the benefits of various programmes provided by the computers. This enables them to enhance their pronunciation as well as production skills.
- 4- In connection to the fourth and the fifth item, it is again found that students have positive attitude towards using computers to have access to whatever they want regarding English language. Moreover, they show their interest and joyfulness in looking for the information they need for the purpose of learning English.
- 5- As far as the sixth item is concerned, there was high percentage in agreeing with the ability of computers to increase students skills and creativity regarding English language learning. The ups and downs in the differences between grades show that age is a very significant factor in determining this issue.
- 6- The majority of the students regardless of age agreed that computers have a great role in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

Conclusion

The above discussions and results relating to the impact of computer in learning English in schools, it is evident that there are a number of areas which have received some attention. These related to:

- 1- A wide range of students learning English language whether they are male or female, skilled or unskilled, and experienced or inexperienced in using computers have a positive attitude toward using computers in learning English as a foreign language in the classroom. This means that sex has no clear impact on students' attitudes towards using computers in learning English.
- 2- As the age variable is concerned, it was found that the 1st secondary grade students show a positive tendency more than the 7th grade students show towards using computers in learning English at classroom.

- 3- Factors which influence students positive attitude towards computers include the benefits of computer mediated communication, the feeling of personal empowerment, and the enhancement of learning opportunities. Another possible factor is the achievement which learning to use computers can help bring about.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the present research, I recommend the following for further research:

- 1- Many publishers concerned with language learning curricula are developing their products by attaching iTools Compact Disks (CD) to the textbooks to raise students motivation and enthusiasm towards learning. Does the use of iTools help EFL learners build up their linguistic competence in professional way faster than relying on textbooks only.
- 2- An idea of dedicating part of English language learning classes for international classroom conversation which might take place among students of the same class by using computer is still available. Does such a technique help students learn the language, or it might help students acquire bad behaviors in learning the language like using abbreviations instead of full form words?

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Appendix 1

أراء الطلبة حول استخدام الكمبيوتر في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

عزيزي الطالب / الطالبة : الرجاء الإجابة على جميع الأسئلة التالية , علماً بأن الإجابات ستستخدم لأغراض البحث فقط ولكم جزيل الشكر ،،،
(أ) معلومات أساسية :
* العمر :
* الجنس : ذكر أنثى
* الصف :

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1. هل لديك جهاز حاسوب في البيت ؟

نعم لا

2. إذا كانت إجابتك في السؤال السابق نعم , كم ساعة تستخدم الحاسوب أسبوعياً ؟

15 فما فوق 14 – 10 9 – 5 4 – 1

3. ما مدى براعتك في الطباعة ؟

ضعيف جيد ممتاز

4. ما مدى مهارتك في استخدام الحاسوب ؟

ضعيف جيد ممتاز

5. هل سبق لك أن استخدمت الحاسوب في إرسال واستقبال رسائل البريد الإلكتروني ؟

دائماً غالباً نادراً أبداً

6. هل سبق لك أن استخدمت الحاسوب في شبكة المعلومات العالمية؟

دائماً غالباً نادراً أبداً

* الرجاء الإجابة على كل من الأسئلة التالية , بوضع دائرة حول الإجابة الدقيقة فيما يلي :

1. أقوم بعمل واجباتي باستخدام الحاسوب بسهولة :

موافق موافق بشدة لا أوافق لا أوافق بشدة

2. استخدام الكمبيوتر في عمل النشاطات يوفر الوقت :

موافق موافق بشدة لا أوافق لا أوافق بشدة

3. أفضل استخدام الكمبيوتر لتطوير مهارتي في المحادثة :

موافق موافق بشدة لا أوافق لا أوافق بشدة

4. استخدام البريد الإلكتروني يمكنني من الاتصال المستمر مع ما يستجد في اللغة الإنجليزية :

موافق موافق بشدة لا أوافق لا أوافق بشدة

5. أشعر بالمتعة عندما أستخدم الكمبيوتر في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية :

موافق موافق بشدة لا أوافق لا أوافق بشدة

6. أشعر عند استخدام الحاسوب في التعلم يزيد من إبداعاتي :

موافق موافق بشدة لا أوافق لا أوافق بشدة

7. أتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بسهولة عندما أستخدم الحاسوب :

لا أوافق بشدة

لا أوافق

موافق بشدة

موافق

Appendix 2

19

Students' attitudes towards using computers

*Age:.....

*Sex: Male – Female

*Grade:

1-Do you have a computer at home?

Yes

No

2- If your answer for the previous question was yes, how often do you use it?

1-2

3-5

6-10

10 and over

3- Classify yourself in typing:

Weak

good

Very good

Excellent

4- What do you think of yourself in terms of using computers?

Weak

good

Very good

Excellent

5- Have you ever used computers for sending or receiving e-mails?

Always

Often

Rarely

never

6- Have you ever used computers for searching on the internet?

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Always Often Rarely never

1- I do my work easily on the computer:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2- Using the computer while doing activities saves time:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

3- I prefer using the computer to enhance my speaking skills:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

4- Using e-mail keeps me on touch with new aspects related to English language:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

5- I enjoy using the computer while learning English:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

6- I feel that using computers in learning increases my creativity:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

7- I learn English easily when using the computer:

Agree Strongly agree Disagree Strongly disagree

January 21, 2013