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## ABSTRACT

Adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) professionals have long used technology to enrich instructional activities. Currently, they are integrating multimedia packages and PowerPoint presentations into instruction. Technology can be used in many different contexts (in the classroom, at distance learning sites, and for extended or self-study). New technologies present opportunities to accomplish multiple instructional goals and may be responsive to different learning styles. Challenges to technology use in adult ESL include financial constraints (funding for adult ESL instruction is usually limited), the digital divide, and matching technology applications to the program's instructional needs and goals. Efforts to use technology effectively in adult ESL instruction include the following: addressing the need for sufficient funding; including technology objectives in state-level adult education planning; choosing technology that supports and complements the approaches, needs, and goals of instruction; developing instructional models that integrate technology applications; creating and using hybrid models; developing software programs and Web sites that are appropriate for and usable by English learners; providing practitioners with appropriate training; researching and documenting the benefits and challenges of various uses of technology in education; and using technology to expand or individualize inside and outside the classroom. Additional resources are listed. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (SM)

# Uses of Technology in Adult ESL Education

NATIONAL CENTER FOR ESL LITERACY EDUCATION

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FL 801498

# Uses of Technology in Adult ESL Education

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The use of technology is not new to the field of adult ESL education. Adult ESL professionals have long used applications such as audio and videotapes, cameras, overhead projectors, and software programs to enrich their instructional activities. More recently, they are integrating multimedia packages and PowerPoint presentations into instruction. Educators continue to explore and develop new uses of technology. They are using it as an instructional tool in the classroom, as a delivery system for learner instruction and teacher training, and as instructional content itself (e.g., learning word processing programs or building Web pages).

Technology can be used in a range of different contexts — in the classroom, at distance learning sites, and for extended or self-study. This adaptability is extremely appealing in a field with a wide variety of program types, content objectives, instructional settings, and learner needs and goals. At the classroom or individual learning level, new technologies present opportunities to accomplish multiple instructional goals (e.g., integrated language skills, critical thinking, cooperative and interpersonal skills). They may also be responsive to different learning styles (e.g., auditory, visual, tactile).

## Trends and Issues

While technology can benefit programs, instructors, and learners in adult ESL (Fitzgerald, 1995), challenges still exist. Programs need financial resources to acquire technology and to support technology use, particularly as applications become more sophisticated, extensive, and expensive than in the past. Funding for adult ESL instruction is usually limited. These financial constraints make the use of technology appealing (e.g., to reach dispersed

learner populations or to provide self-access ESL support). However, acquiring and supporting the hardware and software needed to integrate technology applications in instruction often exceeds the resources available.

Matching technology applications to the instructional needs and goals of the program is another challenge. Factors such as financial limitations or fascination with a high-end technology application can lead to adoption of applications that are either more limited or more complicated than necessary to meet existing needs and goals.

Finally, the *digital divide*, the gap between who has access to technology (specifically computers and the Internet) and who does not, must be considered. While computers and the Internet play a growing role in adult ESL learners' lives at work and home, there are still large segments of this population who do not have easy access to this type of technology and the information it conveys.

## Best Practices

Efforts to use technology applications effectively in adult ESL instruction include the following:

- addressing the need for sufficient funding to support technology integration, including the purchase of hardware, software, and accompanying materials and providing adequate, ongoing technical support for maintenance;
- including technology objectives in state-level adult education planning;
- choosing technology that supports and complements the approaches, needs, and goals of the instruction;
- developing instructional models that integrate technology applications, as well as expanding existing ones;

FL801498

- creating and using hybrid models that combine technology components with elements such as accompanying print materials, traditional classroom instruction, and face-to-face meetings;
- developing software programs and Web sites that are truly appropriate for and usable by immigrants learning English, especially at beginning levels;
- providing practitioners with training in instructional approaches and techniques that incorporate technology applications as well as in the functions and uses of the equipment ("hardware") being used;
- researching and documenting the benefits and challenges of various uses of technology applications as instructional tools and as delivery mechanisms (e.g. video delivery of classes, video series with accompanying materials, hybrid models, online courses);
- using technology to expand or individualize learning inside and outside the classroom (e.g., individualized activity stations, self-access learning labs, and online courses).

## Conclusion

In adult ESL, technology is no longer viewed simply as a replacement for a live teacher. Rather, its various applications are being developed and used as additional tools in the adult ESL instructional repertoire.

## Reference

Fitzgerald, N.B. (1995). *ESL instruction in adult education: Findings from a national evaluation*. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Available: <http://www.cal.org/ncl/digests/fitzgera.htm>

## Additional Resources

Burt, M. (1999). *Using videos with adult English language learners*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Available: <http://www.cal.org/ncl/digests/video.htm>

Children's Partnership. (2000). *Online content for low-income and underserved Americans: The digital divide's new frontier*. Washington, DC: Author. Available: [http://www.childrenpartnership.org/pub/low\\_income/](http://www.childrenpartnership.org/pub/low_income/)

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