

# *Utilization of Information Technology in Foreign Language Teaching*

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**Abstract:** This paper starts from the application of information technology in foreign language teaching and analyzes the characteristics of information technology (which mainly involves networks and multimedia) at this level. Information technology has its unique advantages and disadvantages in foreign language teaching; Foreign language teaching requires the support of modern technological means, while also possessing attributes such as interpersonal interaction and group psychology. Foreign language teachers in distance education are located in the intersection of the two, hence they need to have a clear understanding of such attributes, in order to make the best choices in teaching by integrating those attributes. Finally, the paper concludes that distance foreign language educators must be cautious when dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of information technology in teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

The application of remote multimedia is ubiquitous in our daily lives, and foreign language teaching naturally will not be outside the wave of the information revolution. Almost everyone feels that information technology will revolutionize foreign language teaching. Traditional textbooks, teachers, and teaching methodologies will be phased out and replaced by more technological networks and multimedia. However, after years of application of information networks and multimedia in the field of foreign language teaching, the reality people see is not as people expected in advance [1]. When information technology advances rapidly in the teaching of other disciplines, its progress in the field of foreign language teaching is relatively slow. For example, when students majoring in mechanics or chemistry can complete their laboratory operations on computers, the majority of students in New Oriental Schools are more willing to hire an excellent teacher to provide them with foreign language training in a large classroom filled with hundreds of people, in addition to taking exams on computers. Is it difficult to reconcile information technology with foreign language teaching? Or do they complement each other? This paper stands from the perspective of remote foreign language teaching workers and analyzes their inherent advantages and disadvantages when information technology combined with foreign language teaching. From the perspective of language acquisition, foreign language learning is roughly composed of two stages.

The first thing that learners need to do is to truly and repeatedly imitate the foreign language they are learning, and on this basis, continuously accumulate language materials such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc. This is the first stage of foreign language learning. After completing the first stage, learners will recombine this language material with their communication and expression needs, and apply it to different interpersonal and social environments. The second stage of foreign language learning, is called the cultural learning stage, which refers to the basic completion of the first stage, where a considerable amount of vocabulary has been accumulated and a strong mother tongue thinking mode has been established, thus moving from the "learning" stage to the "using" stage, and completing the focus shift from learning language tools to using language tools.. Although these two stages have their different characteristics, they are not absolutely opposite to each other, and in many cases, they are in a state of interaction and fusion. In the first process, human sensory organs engage in repeated cognitive practice of language materials, including the brain, eyes, ears, vocal organs, and other sensory systems; The second stage not only involves the individual's sensory organs, but also relies on the mutual existence between individuals, that is, the conditions for language occurrence, which is the so-called "scenario" in foreign language teaching. The occurrence of language acts is not only a physiological and psychological need expressed by a single individual, but also a social and cultural need for communication between multiple individuals. This viewpoint has long been widely accepted by people, John Lyons, Linguistics Professor of University Sussex, once concluded, since language is a behavior that is maintained and functions at the social level, there is no need to distinguish between linguistics, sociology and sociolinguistics [2]. Although since language is a socially maintained and socially functional institution, there is ultimately no distinction to be drawn between linguistics and other sciences or social anthropology. From the two different stages of foreign language learning mentioned above, it can be seen that foreign language learning and teaching contain two characteristics. One is repetitive mechanization, and the other is the interactivity of interpersonal communication. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that even in the repetitive mechanics of the first stage, there are also interpersonal factors of group interaction. For example, the process of a baby learning to speak mainly relies on imitating the similar kind around them, rather than repeatedly listening to a semiconductor radio. But when it comes to learning a foreign language as a second language, the imitative nature of learners' physiology and psychology is weakened, while the mechanical nature of artificial coercion and repeated operations is strengthened.

## **2. Differences in attributes and issues between foreign language teaching and information technology**

This paper starts from the application of information technology in foreign language teaching and analyzes the characteristics of information technology (which mainly involves networks and multimedia) at this level. In the vast ocean of foreign language learning materials today, the internet and multimedia can provide unlimited opportunities for people to access these foreign language materials. People can easily access the latest and most classic language materials from around the world on the internet, while also using multimedia methods to preserve and flexibly use these materials. This is the revolutionary contribution that technology has brought to foreign language teaching. It infinitely expands the space for foreign language learning and provides learners with flexible and convenient learning and foot learning methods. At the same time, it also brings new challenges and problems to both learners and educators. These new challenges and issues are: how to screen the vast amount of materials transported by the technology ship, and even pick out different technological means themselves for different learners in different situations. Although the problems can sometimes be challenging, language materials obtained through technological means

and their new learning methods are of enormous value. As long as learners and educators operate properly, the internet and multimedia are undoubtedly one of the best platforms for foreign language learning and teaching.

From the above analysis, we can see that information technology provides people with opportunities to make up for the shortage of textbooks and the inadequate level of teachers in foreign language teaching. However, in specific operations, it is necessary for foreign language teachers and learners to make choices among the vast ocean of information materials. If improper choices are made, the negative effects will be extremely serious, for such improper choices will lead to learners and teachers wasting a lot of time and energy in teaching and learning that do not match their actual needs and level. Like other computer-based courses, using information to learn a foreign language is always possible and can be operated anywhere [3]. However, it is particularly beneficial for foreign language teaching, as it allows learners to easily immerse themselves in a virtual language usage environment. For example, these technologies can create a virtual language communication object for learners or an artificial language usage environment. Another advantage that artificial teachers cannot be compared with information technology is that it never feels tired before learners feel tired during the learning process. This is undoubtedly the best choice for repeated imitation and practice in foreign language learning. Some people believe that technology will liberate foreign language teachers from heavy teaching, but this is actually a misconception, just like jet planes can easily transport a large number of passengers to distant places, but jet planes themselves require a lot of manpower to maintain and operate. Technical means for foreign language teaching are like a high-speed jet plane, which requires careful maintenance and accurate driving by the teacher. The implementation of technology in foreign language teaching requires a lot of work and additional skills from foreign language teachers, and these pressures may be higher than the current conventional foreign language teaching. While information technology provides learners and educators with the optimization, flexibility, and convenience of textbooks, it also has its own fatal weakness in foreign language teaching, which is that it cannot provide interpersonal interaction and unique targeting for different individuals. Undoubtedly, teaching is an interactive art that all educators and learners deeply feel. David, a technical historian at York University in Toronto, once pointed out that education requires connections between people, because the process of education includes elements such as personality development, power generation, encouragement, and competitiveness, all of which can only occur in face-to-face situation. (Education requires a relationship between people because it is a process of identity formation, validation, encouragement, emulation, and inspiration. This only happens face to face.) [4]. In this regard, foreign language teaching seems to require more human interaction than other course teaching. Based on the above analysis, a rough list of the attributes and issues on foreign language teaching and information technology is as follows:

Table 1: Different attributes and issues on foreign language teaching and information technology

Foreign Language Teaching	Information Technology
Cognitive focus, theoretical focus	Extensive and optimized language materials
Repetitive imitation operation	Convenience and flexibility of operation
Interpersonal communication	The difficulty and skills of material selection
Emotional factors in the communication process	The high cost of adjustment and maintenance by teachers
The scarcity of authentic language materials	Lack of interactivity
Individual differences in learner goals	Lack of individual targeting

### 3. Conclusions

In general, the advantages of information technology are: Use the extensive resources it provides to people to make up for the shortcomings of current textbooks and teachers; Use its tireless mechanical nature to meet the needs of learners for repetitive imitation operations; Use its flexibility for teaching across time and space. In order to avoid technological disadvantages, educators should strive to accurately discover the content learners need in the vast sea of language materials, and ensure that these contents can be smoothly implemented in the teaching process, and can be evaluated and corrected in a timely manner. For both foreign language learners and educators, improving the level and skills of online or multimedia material selection may be a long-term and arduous task. They should make up for the lack of interaction in technical teaching with humanized teaching in a timely manner, and enrich and update their own level of information technology usage. We can describe the situation brought by current technology to foreign language teaching in this way, just like the ability and skills that people had to strive for in the past to obtain food, for any food that could satisfy their hunger were crucial for people at that time, no matter what kind of food they had at that time. Now, when people look at the extremely abundant food in front of them, the ability to obtain food is no longer the first priority. However, choosing and pairing among these diverse types of food to achieve a balanced nutrition and rich taste will be a more complex task that people will first face.

Different strategies and applications of technological means can bring different effects. An example occurs in Lyon, the second largest city in France. Once, hundreds of high school graduates from around the world were preparing to start their university studies at French universities, but they had to first use basic French. All high school students are arranged to study French in two different language schools. One of the schools has excellent network or multimedia conditions, and the school also intends to provide students with a large quantity of online or multimedia materials and guidance while giving face-to-face classes, which deprives these students of time and opportunities to communicate with the local Frenchmen; Another school has almost no network or multimedia construction due to funding. After giving students face-to-face classes, the school only takes them to various local places for on-site language exchange to make up for the lack of information technology [5]. Half a year later, students from both schools are required to participate in the TEF (a new authoritative language proficiency test organized by the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry) for foreign students entering French universities. The test is set by French educational institutions and all grading work is completed in France. It not only tests students' understanding and expression of French, but also comprehensively evaluates their French proficiency. The results of the exam, as people imagine, are significantly better for students who study online or in multimedia atmosphere than those who do not. When people began to criticize the second school, a dramatic thing happened. Those students who received high TEF scores from the first school were unable to understand French courses in university, but those from the second school were able to use French freely in university classrooms. The results of unintentional experiments on the use and non-use of technology in two schools have also prompted these two language schools to adjust their technical strategies in a timely manner according to the needs of learners: for exam oriented teaching, schools use internet and multimedia more often; For teaching aimed at language use, more natural situational teaching methods are used.

This example is enough to trigger a rethinking of the relationship between technological means and teaching effectiveness. There are many examples to illustrate that the different objectives of language learning determine the different types, methods, and proportions of technology application. In a word, distance foreign language educators must be cautious when dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of information technology in teaching.

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