

[Forum Article]

Longman English Interactive: A Complete CALL Curriculum

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Introduction

This article evaluates Longman English Interactive, levels 2 and 3, American English CD-based software by Michael Rost and Marjorie Fuchs (2003). In April 2005, the Department of English at Japan Women's University (JWU) implemented a new curriculum for its required, one-year language lab course for English major freshmen utilizing this software. Before this change, the class was taught using two, listening-based textbooks.

According to the publisher, the Longman English Interactive software "is a multi-level, video-based, integrated-skills program that includes more than 100 hours of instruction per level." In addition, it "provides practice in grammar, speaking, listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, and writing" and "students develop essential skills as they work with: contemporary and engaging video, audio, animations" and "extensive practice activities." However, since Longman English Interactive is a self-study software package, the challenge was how to implement it in a language lab setting with a teacher as a facilitator.

General Description

Longman English Interactive consists of three levels: beginning (1), intermediate (2), and advanced (3) and is available in both American and British English. The software is limited to PC platforms (Windows 98, XP, 2000 with Service Pack 2 or higher, or NT 4.0 with Service Pack 5 or higher). Non-English Windows 2000 requires the Professional edition. The software is limited to PC platforms (Windows 98, XP, 2000 with Service Pack 2 or higher, or NT 4.0 with Service Pack 5 or higher). Non-English Windows 2000 systems require the Professional edition. In addition, a Pentium II processor of 400+ MHz and 64+ RAM (128 MB recommended), a 16-bit graphics card, sound card, microphone, and speakers (Microphones plugged into USB ports are not supported), a monitor resolution of 800 X 600 or higher, and a 10X CD-ROM drive are required. The software works within the Internet Explorer browser (5.5 or higher is recommended) and Netscape and AOL browsers are not supported. The browser must have the following plug-ins installed: Macromedia Flash 5 (or higher) and Shockwave 8 (or higher), Apple's QuickTime 5 (or higher), and Sun's Java 1.4.1 (or higher). Finally, Adobe Acrobat Reader 4.0 (or higher) must be installed. The software is available in a single user or network version.

Each level is on a separate CD-ROM and organized into 15 modules: A1-A5, B1-B5, and C1-C5. Each module consists of listening, speaking, grammar, vocabulary, listening challenges, pronunciation, and reading activities followed by a review quiz and a unit summary. After completing five modules, for example, A1 through A5, the students take a test which consists of listening, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading. After completing all 15 modules, the students take a "Level Test" and receive a "Progress Report."

The software includes useful resources for students which include the "Longman Dictionary," "Glossary" and "Grammar Reference." In addition, the student can read explanations in one of nine languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, French, Korean, Chinese, or Japanese. The network version includes a "Class Report" in which the instructor can view each student's scores quizzes and tests for Modules A through C as well as the Level Test. Unfortunately, the class report does not monitor which activities the students have or have not completed.

Procedures

The software delivers the material to students in a well-laid out, easy to use interface utilizing text, audio, and video. The listening section focuses on comprehension. The student first reads the text below the video and then watches the video. She then reads multiple-choice questions and clicks on the answers. For example, the student reads: "Chris takes a taxi. Sam, the driver, knows Chris. Listen. How does Sam know Chris?" The student watches the video with the following dialog:

Chris: Taxi!

Sam: Yeah.

Chris: 989 Union Street, please.

Sam: Sure. Wait, you're the guy from the travel office.

Chris: Pardon me?

Sam: You came into our office last week to I-Travel.

Chris: Right, I did. You look familiar, too.

Sam: Yeah, I work there part-time.

Chris: Oh, right. Now I remember you. So you work at I-Travel and drive a taxi?

Sam: Yeah, I have two part-time jobs.

Chris: Wow, two jobs. Sounds busy.

The student reads and answers questions based on what she has just watched and heard. For example:

1. Where is Chris going?
 - a. To I-Travel.
 - b. To his office.
 - c. To 989 Union Street.

After answering the questions, the student can check her answers. In addition, she can read a transcript of the dialog and click on underlined vocabulary words to get their meanings.

After watching the same video again, the student completes a "drag and drop" exercise in which she inserts vocabulary words into blanks in the dialog.

The speaking section is a role-play activity in which the student chooses to be one of two characters, for example, Chris or Sam. She can then choose to be shown an example, shown an example with blanks, or shown no example. By clicking the play button to begin, the student sees a speech bubble and says her character's lines. As she speaks, she is recording the dialog which she can then review.

The grammar section contains explanations that can be both read and listened to, followed by drag and drop and multiple-choice question activities. For example:

1. Luis: Is Paul your husband?
Laura: Yes, he is. He's a great guy.

In the vocabulary section, the student clicks on words to listen to the word and its example sentence. She then chooses the matching definition and then drags it to the word. If the answer is correct, it will stay. If the answer is incorrect, it will snap back. In the drag and drop exercise, the student has two minutes to complete the exercise in which she reads each sentence and drags and drops the answer into the blanks. If the answer is correct, it will stay. If the answer is incorrect, it will snap back.

In the pronunciation section, the students listen to and read the text, focusing on stress in a dialog. For example: "We've MET before." She also listens for intonation in dialogs that clarify. For example:

A: Be sure to study for the quiz tomorrow.
B: There's a quiz tomorrow? Oh, no!

The reading section focuses first on vocabulary. The student reads an article and guesses the meaning of words in a list, dragging and dropping the answers into blanks. For example, the student reads: "Are you looking for a job? Go to BestJobz.com. It's the number one job site on the Internet! Look for job openings, learn about companies, put your resume online, post a job-wanted ad." The student answers: "You can post your job-wanted ad on the BestJobz.com website." Next, the student reads the same article and focuses on comprehension, answer multiple-choice questions. For example:

2. You can find information about companies on an online job site.
- a. True.
 - b. False.
 - c. No information.

Approach

The following explanation will outline how levels 2 and 3 have been adapted for in-class as well as self-study use. In the first semester, Longman English Interactive 2 is taught,

followed by level 3 in the second semester. The students complete all of the listening, speaking, pronunciation, and related review quiz sections (listening and pronunciation). For self-study, the students complete the grammar, vocabulary, and reading exercises, including those found in the review quizzes. For all in-class activities, the instructor guides the students through each listening and speaking activity by first modeling the activity. After students have completed the activity, the instructor reviews the material, having students repeat words and phrases to gain correct pronunciation and natural fluency. In addition, the instructor can explain cultural points that are highlighted in the activities as well as those that are not.

Students are required to complete all self-study activities, review tests, and module tests in the language lab during times when the LL is not in use. This requires an additional 30 to 90-minutes each week. Students are required to submit their progress report for each module and all tests completed. Each week, after completing both in-class and self-study activities, the students are required to write and submit a "Learning Diary" in which they comment on the activities they have completed and those that gave them trouble. In addition, students can write specific questions related to the activities to which her instructor can respond.

In both the first and second semesters, an in-house written mid-term and final exam are given following the content of the English Interactive programs. These exams test listening comprehension, pronunciation and stress, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. The exams are administered by each LL instructor on an appointed date and time. The course requirements are regular attendance, the completion of all in-class and self-study activities, review and module tests, and learning diaries.

Conclusion

Student feedback on the software and syllabus has been very positive. The students enjoy the contemporary content of the video and audio exercises and in particular, find that their vocabulary grows by leaps and bounds as they progress through the course. In addition, while most students at JWU do not "enjoy" the grammar and reading exercises, they all recognize their need to improve their skills in these areas, particularly their grammar. They have also done a very good job writing their weekly learning diaries because it gives them a chance to ask their instructor particular questions and get direct feedback on different parts of the course that are giving them trouble.

From an instructor's point of view, the Longman English Interactive software offers a welcome break from textbook-based instruction, and although there is not a lot of direct interaction between the teacher and the student, the instructor can monitor the students' progress by viewing the class reports. The instructors at JWU are free to choose how they follow the in-class assignments, as long as they can complete all of the activities listed in the syllabus. While some instructors prefer to guide their students through each activity, others find that it is more useful to review the pronunciation sections with the students at the beginning of each class session, then letting the students work on their own to complete the rest of the in-class exercises. In this case, the instructor can walk around the LL and monitor the students, providing individualized attention to those students who have questions or need help. Personally, I am a firm believer in independent learning strategies; therefore, this software fits perfectly in the language lab scheme. Those readers

interested in obtaining the complete, 12-week syllabus for both the first and second semesters, should contact the author at <forster@fc.jwu.ac.jp>.

Software Titles

Longman English Interactive 2

Publisher: Pearson Education, Inc.
Development: Michael Rost

Longman English Interactive 3

Publisher: Pearson Education, Inc.
Development: Michael Rost & Marjorie Fuchs