

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for Language Learning

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the importance of language is perhaps the most crucial criterion for effective communication; there are many educational, economic, and academic benefits and rewards for high proficiency. Until recently, language learning has been mostly taught through textbooks, printed materials, and teacher-centered learning (D. W. Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981). Many foreign language teachers continuously struggle with keeping student's interest in learning languages (Swaffar 1998). With the invention and advancement of technology, computers have gradually become a mainstay in our world; as such, technology is inevitably becoming an essential part of our lives. Higher priority is being placed on the fluency and comprehension in language (ibid.). Because technology has advanced exponentially, more students are using technology as a means to study for enhanced language learning. The recent introduction of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has allowed students to achieve more in grasping the fundamentals of language. This paper will discuss the introduction of CALL, the main advantages and challenges of using it in a language classroom setting, and will argue that it should continue to thrive and expand to all language classrooms.

COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL)

Definition: While there isn't a clear definition of CALL, it can be best defined as "an approach to language teaching and learning in which computer technology is used as an aid to the presentation, reinforcement and assessment of material to be learned, usually including a substantial interactive element" (Davies, 2001). This can include, but is not limited to, games, interactive quizzes, objective readings, courseware development, and various language practices and research. Many of the software

and programs present questions and problems to which the learner must respond; they can be presented in any form (video, audio, text). The student or learner then responds by pointing and clicking, typing, or speaking into a microphone. The computer then offers feedback, indicating whether the learner's response is right or wrong; then, it attempts to find and analyze the learner's response and identify any errors the student has done.

History: CALL's development can be traced back to the 1960s (Harayoto, 2006). However, it was mainly reserved for large mainframes as personal computers (PC) were not in mainstream development until the 1970s. Upon the introduction of PCs, programs for language learning boomed as programmers and developers were gaining popularity in the U.S. (ibid.). It was initially termed Computer-Assisted Language Instruction (CALI) until the 1980s, when CALL became the primary name of this method. Initially, there was a lack of creativity and originality of programs and software developed for CALL (Gillespie and McKee 1999); however, as technology improved and advanced, so did the open-source for developers to work with. CALL has now presented itself as a critical area of research and implementation in higher education (ibid.). Currently, the world has greater access to various multimedia tools and software thanks to the Internet. With this significant advancement, educators continue to design unique language learning programs both within the classroom and even learning contexts outside of the class where students can continue to learn (Lu, 2018). With thousands of software to choose from, CALL can be considered in a substantial and constant development.

ADVANTAGES OF COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Although there are many enhancements and benefits for CALL, this paper will focus on two main areas.

a. Improved interaction with students

Supporters have universally agreed that interaction with students in learning a language is one of the most vital and critical components in development (Dhaif, 1989). Because language teaching can be very

monotonous and repetitive, students working with CALL programs can be shown new ways of learning language through games or interactive quizzes that can make learning enjoyable. In addition, it allows students to become individual learners; they can decide on their own which language skills (discussed later) they want to develop and advance at their own pace.

They can also receive immediate feedback from the program. In an ideal language environment, a teacher normally has to collect the input from the students and give delayed feedback, which can ultimately reduce its effectiveness and reinforcement of it. Computers, on the other hand, can give instant feedback and allow students to monitor their progress continually, and this can, in due course, provide encouragement to continue their development (Chapelle, 2001).

Because students come from all different levels of proficiency and skill sets, CALL programs are also able to guide them effectively by providing more complicated problems, simpler questions, or repetitive practice; these programs are designed to match the student's ability (ibid.).

b. Improved practice of basic language skills

The basic language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) are needed to become proficient in the target language. In addition to improved interaction, CALL software provides enhanced performance and efficiency to all basic skills (Warschauer & Healey, 1998):

Speaking: Communication is argued as one of the most critical skills in basic language building. Through a microphone, students can mimic what CALL program outputs; this provides students to be guided into oral communicative skills. In addition, through watching interactive videos, learners can also imitate the speeches from person to person.

Writing: Word processing is one of the most frequently used software in computer media. Learners can have access to software that requires them to type text into a word processor and produce written material. Through this, basic keyboarding becomes part of the necessary skills in order to create functional sentences.

Reading: Students can read different media of text available on the

World Wide Web or provided by the software. CALL programs allow students to search for information and answer questions as required.

Listening: There are vast amounts of multimedia available for students to learn a language, most of which will be accessible through video media or podcasts. Students will be presented with a multitude of listening opportunities to enhance their listening skills.

In all cases, students are also indirectly using the computer as a medium, as technology has become integrated into our lives, and it will become increasingly important in future developments. CALL implementation may lead to the integrating of the four skills. Most methodologists have recently claimed that the skills should be presented to students simultaneously (Almekhlafi, 2010). The computer can be utilized to achieve this objective. Furthermore, fostering individualization, providing a new and unique experience, providing more activities, using new technologies, helping shy students, exchanging knowledge with others, are all considered advantages of implementing CALL in the classrooms.

CHALLENGES OF COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

As CALL continues to grow and progress, many opponents and critics have argued the difficulties and challenges of the development of computerized language learning; the main challenges include an increase of educational expenses and labor costs, basic computer literacy competency, and the numerous established and unproven software that can be difficult to navigate through:

a. Increased educational costs and time

The financial burden is among the major obstacles in improving the technology of schools and universities worldwide. Purchasing or upgrading computers requires a considerable amount of budget commitment; that kind of investment is risky for many. Schools are constantly trying to become more cost-efficient with their expenses (Herschbach, 1994). Herschbach argues firmly that new technologies and equipment will inevitably increase costs. However, in many cases,

it can lower the cost of providing educational services that teachers can ultimately offer. While it is true that there may be small financial pledges, it does not necessarily follow that long-term investments of CALL will, in due course, provide both educational and economic gain for everyone. James Torr (2003) also acknowledges that “by insisting that we spend time and money on technological teaching tools, we implicitly reduce the amount of time and money spent on other programs.” Torr believes that we make excuses not to purchase technology that will inevitably save more time for teachers and provide students with advanced tools to improve their language learning. It is in the best interest of everyone to invest in the long-term development of CALL and its features. Regarding the lack of experience, this problem can be solved by time. Considering the slowness and the challenges in preparing lessons using a computer, these problems may be solved by ample training and practice. Psychologically speaking, teachers may deem the computer as a threatening tool that may replace them which indicates that teachers are afraid of computers. (Lam, 2000). However, it should be noted that short-term efforts may produce long-term results in terms of overall efficiency and saving of time.

b. Prior basic knowledge of computer literacy required

Because technology advances rapidly, there is the notion that not everyone is able to keep up; one of the reasons CALL is being frowned upon is because people from the older generations were not exposed to computers until recently (Cole, 2000). Cole himself writes, “Schools are connecting to the Internet and making significant financial investments on computer hardware and software. But many teachers are experiencing feelings of discomfort, dislike and even fear of technology.” Consequently, teachers may feel self-conscious when faced with the technology they are unfamiliar with. As a result, there is a high resistance for computers being available in the classroom. By focusing on the teacher’s perspective, they overlook the deeper problem of stagnant growth for students; by using CALL software and programs that enhance a student’s language learning, the teacher can also learn beside the student and become familiar with its large display of options.

c. The multitude of known and unknown software available to instructors and students

At present, the software of CALL mainly deals with the four skills. However, in particular, there are perhaps too much of an abundance of software, many of which can be difficult to navigate through in terms of finding optimal results, frequency usage, and functionality. For example, there are some speaking programs that have been developed, but their functions are still limited. Warschauer (2004) claims that over 80% of actual CALL software is insufficient for classroom use. Some multiple enterprises and companies prioritize profits over overall usage, and this correlates into a negative connotation that it is not worth the time or effort to implement CALL into the classroom. Proponents of CALL admit that a large number of software programs are not useful, however they argue that there has been an influx of funding and workshops to notify and communicate to teachers and instructors that there can be a huge benefit and an exponential increase in overall language usage. With the assistance of workshops and collaboration throughout, CALL in the classroom can be embraced and as a result, improve overall language comprehension.

CONCLUSION

Many will probably agree with me with this assertion that computers can never replace a “live” teacher. CALL programs will most likely never be completely fail-proof; virtually all machines have a failure rate no matter how relatively small it is. Having said that, computers and, to a larger extent, technology should not be underrated in a classroom setting, especially when learning a language. With it comes to the topic of technology, most of us will readily agree that it inevitably makes our lives more efficient and simpler to perform a variety of tasks. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of computer technology and language learning. Whereas some are convinced that the complement of computers can improve interaction and increase the performance of the language skills, others maintain that the financial barriers and the technical jargon are simply too much to invest in. Though I concede that there are obstacles with CALL and its

continuing growth, I still insist that the long-term investment in CALL should be maintained. Many students learn a language and the skills in an endless amount of methods; with the advancement of computers, learners should have the opportunity to use advanced resources and software to best suit their knowledge and learning of language.

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