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Application of CALL in Language Learning Classrooms: Implications and Concerns

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ABSTRACT

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is briefly defined as the search for and study of computer applications in language teaching and learning. It covers a wide range of ICT applications and approaches to teaching and learning foreign languages. The current paper looks at different aspects of computer-assisted language learning application in language learning classrooms worldwide, takes into consideration the advantages and disadvantages of implementing this technique, and finally considers the possible application, challenges and benefits of the mentioned technique in different language classrooms. Practitioners, teachers and learners may benefit from the discussions of the study.

Key words: CALL, language learning classrooms, ELT

INTRODUCTION

Recently computer has been playing a paramount role in the field of language instruction, to the extent that it has won to earn the acronym 'CALL' in the field of language teaching. Computer assisted Language Learning (CALL) started to be used in a wide range in the 1990s and early 2000s, and there is currently a huge number of books and journals allocated to it. According to Richards and Schmidt (1985), it may take the form of activities which parallel learning language through other media but which make use of the facilities of computer. It can also be seen in form of "activities which are extensions or adaptations of print-based or classroom-based activities (e.g. computer programs that teach writing skills by helping the students develop a topic or thesis statement and by checking a composition for vocabulary, grammar, and topic development)" (Richards & Schmidt, 1985, p. 101).

CALL involves using technology in the form of computers, and a process of transformation in the institution where implementation actually is undertaken (Timucin, 2006). Hence, as stated by Timucin (2006), CALL should be perceived as an interdisciplinary issue which entails "strategies for managing change alongside the knowledge of the use of computers for educational purposes, and language teaching methodologies" (p. 263). CALL is geared towards the proceduralization or acquisition of the formal elements existing in the target language on the one hand, and of rudimentary pragmatic forms and micro- and macro-level features which explicate the bond between statements, on the other hand (Cornu et al. 1990)

HISTORICAL STAGES OF CALL

Since the 1960, as maintained by Flowerdew and Miller (2005), the use of computer can be divided into three main stages: behaviorist CALL, communicative CALL, and integrative CALL.

Behaviorist CALL was formed by behaviorist theory. The type of language exercises students were asked to perform via computer was confined to some repetitive drills. Whatever activity students did on computer was only circumscribed to reading and writing. Communicative CALL was the next stage of computer use. This followed the pedagogical trend into communicative language teaching. With the appearance of personal computers learners students were provided with freedom to engage in language learning activities in their own homes. The type of exercises focused more on the use of forms than on mechanical manipulation of the forms. However, the focus was still on written texts. Integrated CALL is aimed at integrating various skills and integrating technology fully into the language learning process. Now, with the expansion of computer storage facilities, it is possible to download sound clips, video clips etc. which pave the way for developing students' listening skill.

APPLICATIONS OF CALL

According to DeKeyser (2007), CALL can be usefully applied in three ways. First, computer-based technologies can help secure high-quality practice through large-scale curricular collaborations with native-speaking students enrolled in a course in another country. The second way through which the best use can be made of computer-assisted technologies is using email assignments with teachers and with tutors. Finally, computer mediated synchronous forums can maximize the benefits of collaborative L2 practice carried out not only outside but also inside classroom.

CALL IN SPEAKING

Current trends in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have yielded better and newer perspectives and directions for assessment of speaking skills (Luma, 2004). CALL-based pronunciation training and testing are, according to Luma (2004), gradually being incorporated in the classroom and have evolved to include automatic computer raters and assessment procedures that could be done without the presence of a teacher.

NETWORK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AND CALL

Network-based language teaching (NBLT) is a language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to each other in global or local networks (Warschauer & Kern, 2000), hence showing a new form of CALL. On the one hand, NBLT has communication as its core, and on the other, NBLT breaks with the time and space limits which are imposed by face to face communication and traditional language tools, therefore, paving the way for multiple forms of learning, communicative practice, and collaboration. It is, however, warned by Warschauer and Kern (2000) that the advantages of NBLT can be explored through the research examining particular practices of use in certain contexts.

ISSUES SIGNIFICANT IN THE NORMALIZATION OF CALL

Chambers and Bax (2006) suggest the following significant issues in normalizing CALL:

A. Logistics

Issue 1: In order for normalization to take place, CALL facilities will not be separated from normal teaching space.

Issue 2: In order for normalization to take place, the classroom will be ideally organized to pave the way for an easy move from CALL activities to non-CALL activities.

Issue 3: for language teachers to normalize computer use in their daily practice, they may need additional time for planning and preparation.

B. Stakeholders' conception, knowledge and abilities

Issue 4: For normalization to be achieved, language teachers and managers should have enough knowledge and ability with computers so as to feel confident in making use of them.

Issue 5: Normalization needs cooperation on parts of different stakeholders.

Issue 6: To normalize CALL, teachers and managers should avoid technical fallacy, the view that the chief determinant of success is software or hardware.

C. Syllabus and software integration

Issue 7: Successful normalization of CALL requires a proper integration of CALL into syllabus.

Issue 8: Progress towards normalization can be enhanced by making use of authorable CALL materials which allow teachers to tailor CALL activities better to meet the syllabus aims.

D. Training, development and support

Issue 9: For CALL to be normalized, teacher training and development can best be offered in collaborative mode.

Issue 10: in order to normalize CALL, teachers' concerns about technical failure and their lack of skills to deal with such failures should be addressed.

Issue 11: Technical help is paramount, but not sufficient, importance. There is the need for pedagogical support also.

CRITICISMS AGAINST CALL

In spite of the fact that communicative CALL was seen as an advance over behavioristic CALL, it also began to come under criticism (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, as stated by Warschauer and Healey (1998), critics pointed out that the computer was still being used in an ad hoc and disconnected fashion, thus finding itself making a greater contribution to marginal rather than central elements of the language learning process. This corresponded to a broader reassessment of communicative language teaching theory and practice. Many teachers were shying away from a cognitive view of communicative teaching to a more social or socio-cognitive view, which put greater emphasis on language use in authentic social contexts.

FINAL REMARKS

Although CALL is getting popular more than ever before, it seems that some teachers and learners are reluctant to use CALL and prefer to use course books. As Ur (2012) states, the reason why many teachers and learners appear to be unwilling to use CALL and prefer to use course books is partly because books are cheaper, and in some places electronic facilities are not easily available. It is also because they can be quickly opened, used, and navigated without dependence on technology, electricity or Internet connection. On the other hand, as argued by Ur (2012), they lack the flexibility, adaptability to the individual, enormous range of informational sources and various interactive options of computer-hard and software. Likewise, Timucin (2006) argues that despite the growing interest among scholars in CALL, it can be argued that there exists a gap between the available literature on the use of computers and technology for teaching purposes and experience of the actual process of implementation in the context of EFL. Last but not least, Heift and Rimrott (2008) maintain that with respect to program design, CALL programs need to include help pages and tutorials that discuss effective use of the miscellaneous aspects of the learning tool, not only from a technical, but pedagogical view point.

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