

COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING :BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

Ms. Julie Prathibha *

When the ground rules for successful implementation of "**Computer Assisted Language Learning**" (**CALL**) is followed in the researcher's demonstration classes **CALL** was shown to be advantageous to the higher secondary class students irrespective of their medium and location in a multitude of ways, regardless of what format of **CALL** is employed. All the different formats of **CALL** shown to be potential, to greater or lesser extent, of contributing to the learning process in my **CALL** classroom in the several of the following ways:

Students' motivation increases:

Computers are very popular among students. They present students fun and games. They are considered as fashionable. So the students' motivation is increased because computers offer a lot of activities and that provides students to feel more independent. How **CALL** was advantageous in my **CALL** class room:

1. Communication is perceived as authentic.
2. Students have time to plan their utterances
3. Student's language proficiency was much better than in normal classroom communication. Students get meaningful reading practice. The web impacts on resource-based learning and access to real world information.
4. The level of reliability and currency of information adds to authenticity of learning tasks, with realistic and up-to -date information. Students' anxiety and inhibitions about using the L2 decreases.

*Research Scholar, Dept. of English Manonmaniam Sundarnar University.

5. Students' participation in the classroom activities becomes more equal.
6. Participation of shy learners as well as slow learners increases. Students' vocabulary and their diction improve and increase. As the four skills in them has developed skills in oral language production are enhanced.
7. Students' grammatical competence increases.
8. Students become more independent learners.
9. The student-teacher relationship is altered in such a way that the teacher becomes fewer dominants and more of a guide or a facilitator.
Focus is shifted from learning the language to achieving the common goals in social interaction. The foreign language becomes a means of communication.
10. Students' cross-cultural knowledge and understanding increases.
11. Videos, pictures and sound presented by computers stimulate sight and hearing simultaneously in a way traditional resources do not.
12. Using computers to learn English can help learners to become more disciplined. The computer can bring support to the learning strategies acquired by students.
13. Teachers' responsibilities include giving students the strategies they need for working on their own.
14. Computers with CD-ROM may provide considerable input and a wide variety of registers and accents.

The input computers can provide and facilitate the formation of ideas.

Computers provide access to authentic materials and audiences around the world through the Internet. A computer-enhanced environment may encourage language acquisition.

One of the advantages of CALL is that it offers a powerful self-access facility; that it helps to generate autonomous learners who will experience freedom of choice. The tools that learners find in computers allow them to assume mastery of their own learning experience. Students can call up the programs held by computers whenever they want; besides, computers are sensitive to the learner's level of proficiency. This advantage, though, can also be seen as a disadvantage, since many teachers may consider that computers are undertaking functions that should be performed by trained teachers. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that this disadvantage is not a real one, since, in fact, computers should be used by teachers as a complementary tool in the teaching process

Another advantage of CALL is that it gives a new role to the teaching materials. Out of the context of CALL, teaching materials are passive. As Phillips points out, before computers were used in the classroom context, nothing the student said or did could influence in any deep sense the linear progression of the content. In CALL, materials adapt themselves to the requirements of the individual student: that is why they become interactive.

Computers allow teachers to give exercises a more attractive aspect by means of colours, different letter styles; pictures- even animated ones, etc. The media can assist pupils in learning to grow faster than our traditional classroom methods. The teacher as well as the learner will find more time with new resources to create new ideas, procedures and materials for the classes.

Desktop publishing with word processors, printer and graphics helps young students create books and poems. The computer is also an excellent tool for the teacher for the preparation of work sheets and exercises as well as a source of material.

Interactivity

Strength of CD-ROM materials is their ability to create a situation in which learners can interact with the learning materials and reference materials. This control allows learners as individuals to approach the material with their own agendas and their own actions. Learners using CD-ROM materials are not passive; they need to think about the language, engage with it, and to respond to it. The active and involved learner is thought to be a better learner.

Enhanced Student Achievement

Computer-based instruction may be helpful for students to strengthen their linguistic skills by affecting their learning attitude positively and by making them build self-instruction strategies and increase their self - confidence (McGreal 1988:16).

Individual learner differences

All language learners are very different in terms of their needs, interests, strengths and weaknesses, motivations, learning styles etc. The ability of the CD-ROM to be used as a flexible self-study resource may be useful in accommodating these learner differences. Learners can focus on language areas that they decide, they need help in and ignore others. They can take as much time as they like and choose the variety of media they prefer to learn from. They can work at whatever pace they choose and use or not use any off-line media that they wish.

Autonomy/learner control

As with all self-study resources the responsibility for many of the learning decisions during the use of CD-ROMs is passed over to the learner. The decisions about what to study, when to study, how to study, how long to study for are all passed over to the person who ideally should control them, the learner. Lee reports that most successful language learners assumed responsibility for their own learning. CD-ROM with its wealth of material in different media and its in built feedback makes it suitable for autonomous learning.(18)

Non-threatening/Non-judgmental

Work completed in the computer environment is essentially a private affair. Only the learner detects the errors. There is no public loss of face at errors

HYPERLINK

"<http://websearch01.mccclient.com/search.php?s=discussions+on+advantages+and+disadvantages+of+teaching+english++grammar+through+computers+&rnd=92sv7e>"

on what teachers and classmates may presume to be elementary language or skills and assumed as already having been mastered. The non-public domain of this form of learning may free learners to explore areas that they may not like to admit to not having understood and thus in a class situation taking up the time of teachers and other learners. This may well serve to lower affective filters.

Flexible - a variety of modes of use.

CD-ROMs can be used in a variety of ways within different learning situations. As mentioned above, use as a self-access resource is one of the most common and obvious features. The materials on CD-ROMs can be linked into courses, syllabuses or assigned to learners for homework or as follow up activities to work undertaken classroom sessions. Teachers to help in their lesson preparation, providing texts, sound, video, grammar or vocabulary exercises that can be used in class, can also use reference CD-ROMs. These CDs can also be used by learners as research materials for classroom presentations or as sources for materials and information for project work. Learners working together around a multimedia PC can use the tasks, input, or information as a basis for group work, and joint decision-making.

◆ **Breaking the monotony:** No matter how good and motivated teachers and the students might be, there is always a moment when both parties feel as if they have had enough of it.

How do we make the monotony and make learning process more enjoyable? Computer based activities can solve the problem. On-line testing, computer based vocabulary or grammar exercises make the process of memorizing and routine checking up less boring and more effective. Common vocabulary development or grammar exercises on the computer take less time, involve various mechanisms, like click and type, click and use drag, etc.; make use of various colour, shapes, photos and pictures. Authentic texts of diverse formats are available on the net and or learning readymade software packages. All these activities break the monotony of learning grammar patterns and add to the positive effect of both learners and teachers. Another way of breaking up the monotony of language learning is a variety of learning activities that can be performed only through the application of ICT. The enhanced exposure to opinions and ideas breaks stereotypes and monotony; it enriches the process of learning and makes it more stimulating.

◆ **Being Creative:** The teachers can create their own material. High technologies do not only provide a huge bank of online resources, but they also offer "Do-it on our own" possibilities. The teacher can not only update or complete the existing ready-made courses, but he or she can tailor the course according to the specific needs of the students. The teacher can easily group or re-group learners according to the specific tasks, levels or some other principles, which might open new possibilities in the deliverance of the syllabus. From my experience once the teachers get the bug of creating their own materials, he or she will find more and more opportunities for that, which will have a favourable effect not only on the syllabus itself, but also a profound positive feeling of implementing the goals and wishes. Creating a focus on English and how it is used, for example through text tools, authoring programmes or writing frames Subject specific writing frames, templates, created or authentic text can be used to scaffold ESL learner writing in new styles or genres. Comparing learner versions

between themselves and against models can help learners identify improvements they could make.

◆ **Increasing opportunities to use first languages to support curriculum and English learning**, for example through internet translation tools, electronic bilingual dictionaries, first language subject related texts and explanations on the internet. Using first language material sourced on the internet can help learners draw on their understanding in their first language. Creating or sourcing first language and bilingual sound files can be especially helpful if learners are not literate in their first language. Research shows that developing first language expertise and academic use supports the development of the second language.

◆ **Providing opportunities for learners to become autonomous learners and to practice their skills in particular areas of English** for example through specific software or internet based research. Computer based English language learning activities can increase confidence and competence in specific areas but need to be linguistically and culturally appropriate and appropriately scaffolded. They can be useful tools for independent study and autonomous learning.

◆ **Increasing opportunities and motivation to communicate in English**, for example through email exchanges, video conferencing, virtual classrooms or web page authoring. Computer mediated communication (CMC) increases the ways learners can communicate. Communication can be less culturally and linguistically bias. Research suggests CMC encourages EAL learners to risk take with language, to learn from the language of others and encourages different language structures.

◆ **Stimulating working, thinking and talking collaboratively which supports EFL learners to process and**

embed language and curriculum learning. EFL learners opportunities to process language and curriculum at a deeper level. ICT as a stimulus can provide the context for this, and can be used to stimulate exploratory talk and encourage collaboration in the construction of learning.

Role of the Teacher

Thus, the use of CALL software in teacher led situations can dramatically alter the teachers' role. Freed of the need to provide input, to cue up and switch on videos and tapes, exonerated from the selection of en masse learning aims and from orchestrating lock-step task sequences and from providing whole group feedback, a teacher is free to work with individuals. The teacher's role as a guide and a facilitator was identified during my research.

It is generally recognized that the roles assumed by the teachers are related to transmission, to leading students actions, to being the subject-matter expert possessing knowledge of fixed and precise contents which are capable of being attained by the students. Linked to the use of the Web and other multimedia resources, in most of the CALL settings, the role of the teacher as the "knowledge" authority or as the transmitter of information is in danger when using extensively sources of information different from that provided by the teacher. The teachers act more as learning guides, when I used multimedia and the internet I had to change my teaching style, that I was carrying on or practicing for the last 6 years.

Teacher as a Learner in the CALL Class room

Teachers are accepting that students might do better in special fields and were ready to learn with and from them: 'quite of ten roles wee changed between teacher and student, especially when the latter was more experienced in using the new technology'. Such a collaborative approach leads to the acquisition of ICT competencies by both the teacher and the student.

Student as a Teacher

Social and active learning can be encouraged in CALL Class room, new pedagogical concepts enable the students to understand the role of the teacher as more actively integrated into the teaching learning process.

Economic Factors

There are a variety of real world economic pressures that are bringing themselves to bear on private language institutions and in the public language-learning sector. Such pressures are the need to cope with increased class sizes, reductions in the number of class contact hours, and staff reductions. While CALL software can never replace teachers for ever, they may provide a useful learning tool in institutions, which are interested in maintaining a uniform quality in the face of these economic constraints.

Efficiency

There are efficiencies in range of audience, learner time and in quantity of data. Multimedia software is more efficient for learners to access than other media or combinations of traditional EFL media once the software's contents, navigation and is mastered.

Motivation and interest

There is evidence that the use of multimedia for self-access work is seen as more motivating and attractive than the traditional books and tapes or videos. This may be due to the novelty factor or to the very appealing features of multimedia. Repeatability the computer is a tireless workhorse, unlike many of us teachers, and software of all descriptions can be run endlessly. The interactive nature of multimedia software, and its ability to provide tasks, receive learner reactions to those tasks and provide an evaluation to those responses can all be endlessly invoked.

Disadvantages of CALL

1. Computers discourage some students and teachers.

2. Many students and teachers reject a change from the traditional classes.
3. It is very difficult for some students to get used to being independent learners.
4. Indisciplined students have problems working with computers.
5. Computers do not provide some important features of real communicative exchanges.
6. Computers are machines and they need maintenance, something, which may require interruptions to class or study time.
7. Computers do not provide the sense of cooperation that can be found in a class with a teacher. Reading from computer screens is about 25% slower than reading from paper. Even users who don't know this human factors research usually say that they feel unpleasant when reading online text. As a result, students don't want to read a lot of text from computer screens:

Teachers' Barriers to the Use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

The barriers inhibiting the practice of Computer-assisted Language Learning can be classified in the following common categories

- ◆ Financial barriers
- ◆ Availability of computer hardware and software
- ◆ Technical and theoretical knowledge, and
- ◆ Acceptance of the technology.

Financial Barriers

Language education practitioners mention technical barriers most frequently in the literature. They include the cost of hardware, software, maintenance (particular of the most advanced equipment),

and extend to some staff development. Froke said, "Concerning the money, the challenge was unique because of the nature of the technology." (1994 :20)

Availability of Computer Hardware and Software

The most significant aspects of computer are hardware and software. Availability of high quality software is the most pressing challenge in applying the new technologies in education. Underlying this problem is a lack of knowledge of what elements in software will promote different kinds of learning. There are few educators skilled in designing it because software development is costly and time-consuming.

He indicated having sufficient hardware in locations where learners have access to it problematic and is, of course, partly a financial problem. Computer hardware and software compatibility goes on to be a significant problem. Choosing hardware is difficult because of the many choices of systems to be used in delivering education, the delivery of equipment, and the rapid changes in technology.

Technical and Theoretical knowledge

A lack of technical and theoretical knowledge is another barrier to the use of Computer-assisted language learning technology. Not only is there a shortage of knowledge about developing software to promote learning, as shown above, but many teachers do not or cannot understand how to use the new technologies. Furthermore, little is known about integrating these new means of learning into an overall plan. In the communication between McClelland and C.Dede (Office of Technical Assessment, 1995).

Dede indicated the more powerful technologies, such as artificial intelligence in computers, might promote learning of higher-order cognitive skills that are difficult to access with today's

evaluation procedures and, therefore, the resulting pedagogical gains may be under-valued. Improper use of technologies can affect both the teacher and learner negatively.

Acceptance of Technologies

We live in a time of changes. Gelatt stated that change itself has changed. Change has become so rapid, so turbulent, and so unpredictable that is now called "white water" change. There is a natural tendency for organizations to resist change. Wrong conceptions about the use of technology limit innovation and threaten teacher's job and security. (1995:35) Instructors are tend not to use technologies that require substantially more preparation time, and it is tough to provide instructors and learners access to technologies that are easy to use.

Conclusion

One of the objectives of the research is to show the multiple numbers of benefits of using computers in EFL classes. The benefits are better perceived when the teacher actually uses computers to teach grammar than when he/she reads about them. The disadvantages listed here and the ones found when working with computers would never outweigh the improvement noticed in CALL classrooms. One of the greatest improvements is that the user of computer for teaching purposes can produce autonomous learners who can control at least part of their learning process. Seeing the interest shown by the students in the CALL classroom to learn their L2, the teachers were even motivated and wanted to have more such interesting CALL classes. To conclude, though CALL cannot be the panacea for all our problems in the L2 classroom, at the same time it is evident that great methodological advances can be made. The specialized CALL soft wares that has been and is constantly being created together for the higher secondary students will definitely make possible the most effective learning and improvement of the four skills in L2 classes.

Keeping the students engage in Computer-assisted Language Learning is a continuing challenge that requires time and commitment. In the 21st century, we realize that technology as such is not the answer to all our problems. What really matters is how we use technology. Computer can or will never substitute teachers but they offer new opportunities for better language practices. They may actually make the process of language learning significantly richer and play a key role in the reform of a country's educational system. The next generation of students will feel a lot more confident with information technology than we do.

REFERENCES

- Froke, M. 1994. "A Vision and Promise: Distance Education at Penn State, Part 1 - Toward an experience-based definition." *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 42, pp. 16-22.
- Gelatt, H.B. 1995. "Future sense: Creating the Future." *The Futurist*, 3(2), pp. 35-43. *Computers, Languages Learning and Language*.
- Lee, K. 2000. *English Teacher's Barriers to the Use of Computer-Assisted language learning*. London: Oxford University Press.
- McGreal, R. 1988. "Computer Assisted Instruction: Non- human but not Inhuman." *English Teaching Forum*, July , pp.15-17.