

Enhancing English Language Communication using Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Dr. Neha, M.Phil, Ph.D.

Lecturer HES-II

Education Department

Haryana

nehachaudhary29@gmail.com

Abstract

The last two decades have seen a great rise in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) - a step which supplements the teachers teaching English in the classroom and enables learners to receive great support in their endeavor to acquire the language. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is the kind of learning where computers are engaged to learn a new language using various language games and activities. This approach is practical based where the usage of forms is emphasized rather than the forms themselves. Enhancing English Language Communication using CALL not only empowers a learner in comprehending the target language but also provides freedom to learn them at his own pace.

CALL is a set of tools which makes use of technology to impart training through computer, multimedia and the internet. It is more student-centered and is expanding its horizon rapidly as the learners' involvement is more. It also facilitates individualization where the students can participate at individual level, in a team or in a large group. In the information age, communicative competence is preferred to linguistic competence thereby giving more importance to fluency rather than accuracy. Therefore, this paper will focus on the role of CALL in the present context.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), English Language Communication, Speaking skills, Student-centred.

Introduction

The rapid development in the field of technology has opened novel and innovative ways of teaching and learning. It has now become much convenient for a teacher to bring the content online and to correlate it with real life situations. Digital technology has become a teaching tool where the teacher develops the reading content based on individual learning style which can be

restructured as per the need of the learners. In this way the tools of technology can be blended with the conventional methods of teaching. This is the idea from where the concept of blended learning has come up. Blended learning is the latest buzz in pedagogy where the users get exposure to web based exercises while they learn from their books and handouts. It is frequently being employed in teaching specially languages like English. It supplements face to face conversation between a teacher and a learner with technology. It makes use of the latest means of technology such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), internet, blog, Facebook etc. For communication to take place there is a need of a common language and English is that connecting language which unites people from different parts of the world. It acts as the most important medium to convey information, to share knowledge or to express opinion.

Scope of the Paper

The present paper is based on the experimental study carried out on the Undergraduate students of different branches of engineering throughout the semester. The teaching learning activities involved blended learning, which combine face to face conversation and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). However, this paper will focus on only the role of CALL in the present context.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are to help students to:

- a) improve the speaking skills of the learners with special focus on pronunciation;
- b) enrich the vocabulary and its usage in day to day life situation;
- c) provide clarity on the basic concepts of grammar, recognize each part of speech and be able to use them in their speech.
- d) encourage them to speak during Group Discussion and make them more confident;
- e) enable them to make effective use of technology aids in learning English;
- f) broaden the horizon of their knowledge.

Full Text

With the objective of enhancing the speaking skills of the learners while also refining grammatical accuracy and enriching their vocabulary, 255 learners in the age group of 18 -19 years were taught a 42 - hour course in Communication Skills based on blended learning. Smaller groups of 20 students each were formed who were given rigorous exercises ranging from the basic level to the toughest one. Further each small group was divided into two sub-groups which were taught differently. One with the conventional classroom lecturing through textbooks and using blackboard and the other group was taught the course material using tools of technology like computer, projector, smart board etc. in the language lab.

Different applications of CALL like NPTEL videos, Computer software and Power point presentation program were employed to engage learners in various activities focused on speaking skills, grammar and vocabulary. The software comprised several modules on speech training, grammar and its usage, inter-personal skills and oral presentation skills. Out of 42 hours, 28 hours were spent on various language games or activities like Group Discussion, JAM sessions, Debate, Role Play, Picture Interpretation, Extempore, Listening Comprehension particularly BBC videos and Story Telling etc. that created interest and could hold the attention of the learners.

The three instruments which computer technology generated were the language software, NPTEL videos and power point presentations. The learners were provided many opportunities to speak before the class in the process of English language learning. They got the opportunity to participate actively in more effective and more natural manner either at the individual level or in the groups in addition to the assistance received from the computers. At the end of the course a test was given to the learners of the experimental group in order to observe the transformation brought about in their personality. Their performance was assessed in terms of pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, frequency of interaction etc. The results reflected that the exercises pertaining to different aspects of grammar given in the computer software provided rich use of language resources and also gave opportunities for participating in speaking activities. This endeavor motivated the learners as computer technology makes a great appeal to adolescent learners. The ease of accessibility and availability of these technology driven applications has made them widely used. The focus of the study will be on the three main applications of CALL which are given as under:

1) Computer Software: Learner as Listener

The purpose of language software is to stimulate and support self-learning. It lets the learner away from the physical classroom and enables him to learn at personal level. The most important advantage of learning through software is that the learner can access it multiple times for self-improvement. Here the user or the learner learns at his convenience and with his own pace. As a result, he feels motivated when he learns various activities from computer software because he himself can assess his performance.

Certainly, this self-instruction mode helped in the study for bringing desirable and significant changes for which it was aimed at. Eventually the students gained high self-confidence. Weak and reluctant students were greatly benefitted from these self-instruction exercises. There were various modules softwares for learning different concepts of the English language. For example, to learn the basic concepts of grammar there were many exercises given under intermediate level in the form of quizzes, sentence completion, jumbled words, listening

comprehension etc. The students could connect better with the online studying as it helped them to give a better platform for learning. However, for this study, Group Discussion was chosen from the software to teach and then to execute it in the class.

To carry out the Group Discussion, the class was divided into two teams comprising 7 students each. With Team A the do's and don'ts were discussed by the teacher through lecturing and interacting while Team B used the software and learnt about the steps to be followed in GD. Besides they also watched a sample of GD. Thereafter both the teams were given a same topic for discussion and the entirely surprising results were found which are given below:

- 1) Team B was more active and could express its point of view in vivid and lucid manner as compared to Team A.
- 2) Less mistakes were committed by the members of Team B as compared to those of Team A since they had learnt it by watching a sample GD. Apparently it seemed absolutely true that actions speak louder than words, so here also the sample video ascertained the positive influence on the viewers.
- 3) The group members of Team B were keen, interested, motivated and carried the GD forward in the positive direction by providing the opportunity to everyone to speak which strengthened the team spirit and inculcated the feeling of togetherness.
- 4) The group members of Team B were more confident in expressing their point of view and showed significant improvement.

2) NPTEL Videos: Learner as Viewer

National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) has enabled the learners to enhance their knowledge and has grown substantially. It offers various online tutorials and video lectures on several topics delivered by eminent professors belonging to IITs and IISc. It is extremely useful for English learners as they can watch these videos repeatedly free of cost and can bank upon them anytime.

It creates congenial learning environment for the learner who learns it at his own pace. He seeks to comprehend what is being taught through the videos. But the major drawback of this mode of learning is that it is one-way communication where the teacher monologues the content. The input is given by the teacher at one end while the learner receives it at the other end. He is just a recipient of what is being said. The learner is only a passive listener as he receives the instructions through video and cannot ask questions immediately. As a result, it becomes monotonous. However, a teacher present in the classroom always supplements this mode of learning by exploring unlikely examples to the students who need explanation.

Though NPTEL is a breakthrough in the field of education and a powerful source of information yet it encourages some passivity among learners. The easy availability of the content is killing the thinking power as well as dominating their creativity. Who would like to write an essay if it can easily be fetched from the internet? It is human tendency to go for readymade things rather than to make efforts in creating their own material. Moreover, technology helps to save time, do the things faster and one can access the internet anywhere because of its omnipresence nature.

It promotes “do-it-yourself-approach”. The learners are not bound by the fixed schedule of formal classroom lectures. There is no fear of teacher asking the question or humiliating and discouraging the students in the class. Moreover, it does not ask for any kind of discipline. The biggest advantage is that there is no competition among the students. It also helps in dealing with the huge shortage of competent teachers and thus helping India in its progress.

3) PowerPoint Presentation: Learner as Speaker

PowerPoint presentation program has become an integral part of teaching learning process. It is generally preferred to use them in large classes where it is difficult to hold their attention throughout lecture class. It has proved itself to be a ubiquitous part of the classroom. Power point presentation was used as a technology tool in this study also to show its positive impact on learners for acquisition of a foreign language and to promote motivation towards learning among the learners. Positive results were seen at the end and the following observations were made:

- They were highly motivated and had a sound knowledge of the subject matter.
- They liked to study through PowerPoint slides, and it was an astonishing fact that they gave higher rating to the teacher who used power point in its lecture.
- It helped learners to retain the content for a longer period of time because of its visual impact.
- They were engaged by fetching their attention via adding effects, highlighting text, coloured content or using various fonts like serif and sans serif. They learnt the topic by practically doing it. As a result, two-way communication took place which was more student-centered rather than teacher or technology centered.
- They interacted with the whole class and involved the audience by showing the content in the slides. They were the centre of attraction and played a pivotal role in delivering the content.
- They learnt more as the content was presented in compact and crisp form.

It is also believed that ppts may also be used to build students' attitude toward the instructor and the syllabus because here the syllabus is taught in small topics. As a result, it helps in retaining the content. It is preferred by the teachers to use it in class to attract the students, to support their explanations and to maintain their interest as the content looks more pleasing.

Outcomes of the Study

- a) Positive feedback received.
- b) Increase in confidence level, no longer reluctant to speak.
- c) High level of motivation.
- d) Better communication skills.
- e) Optimistic attitude to tackle the situation.
- f) Imbibe the quality of leadership.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that the article summarizes the latest trends in the use of digital technology in teaching learning process and how these trends can be incorporated in the class room teaching. Thus the computer has proved to be a major support system for the teacher to promote learner centered activities using a variety of materials and techniques. The teaching is incorporating the technology by which learner can learn more by itself. Technology sustains the interest and motivates the learner as it appeals to him. The classroom teaching becomes more interesting and interactive with the help of these modern gadgets.

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