

E-Resources and CALL Perspectives Of English Language Teaching

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Abstract

The 20th century showcases an extensive progress in educational technologies all over the world. Computers entered the school life in the late 1950s in developed countries and have been still developing continuously. Recently, the power, rapidity and user-friendly conveniences of computers have started dominating the usage of technology. Computer peripherals such as hard disks, CDROMs, laser disks and printers are also used. With all these, a computer program can turn to be a holistic package merged with sound, pictures and video along with characters. This paper is an attempt to explore such e-resources utilized in teaching English language.

Introduction

Computer is a device that processes information with great speed and accuracy. Computers process information by helping to create the information itself, by displaying, storing, recognizing, and communicating information to other computers. In general, they process numbers, words, still or moving pictures, and sounds.

Recent years have shown a boom of interest in using computers for foreign language teaching and learning. A decade ago, computers had been used for a small set of western learners. However, with the advent of multimedia computing and internet, the role of computers in language instruction has now become an important issue confronting large numbers of English language teachers. To be realistic, although most teachers on the world level still use chalk and blackboard, CALL is routinely used as language instruction aid like the USA, Japan, and Western European countries including Turkey. This provides supplementary practice in the four skills writing, reading, speaking and listening, as well as grammar and problem solving. Though, "instructors need to understand how CALL can best be used to offer effective instruction to language learners" (Chapelle, 1990).

At the end of the 20th century, the computer-mediated communication and the Internet have reshaped the use of computers for language learning. Computers are no longer a tool for only information process and displaying but also a tool for information processing and communication. Learners of English language, with the help of the internet, can now simultaneously communicate with others all through the world. Nonetheless, computers can never replace the 'live' teacher, especially in language teaching, where the emphasis is on mutual communication between people. It can just play a role in teaching the second or foreign language as an aid to the teacher (Dhaif, 1989).

There is huge amount of foreign language materials next to the traditional grammar book and dictionary. These materials include-course books, workbooks, programmed courses, cue cards, charts, newspapers, posters, picture cards, and cut outs, and so on. These are supplemented by other media, such as radio, television, slides, OHP, video tapes, games, toys, as well as computers, multi-media and the Internet. The language laboratories which are found in the 1970s under the influence of the Audio-lingual Method has given room to computer assisted language learning (CALL) work stations. “Micro computers used as word processors complement the audio facilities, enabling the interactive teaching of all four language skills reading, listening, speaking and writing”. (Crystal, 1987: 377). Crystal further adds that today a great variety of FLT exercises, such as sentence restructuring, checking of spelling, checking of translations, or dictation tasks, and cloze tests can be computationally controlled using texts displayed on the screen.

The abbreviation CALL stands for Computer Assisted Language Learning. It is a term used by teachers and students to describe the use of computers as part of a language course. (Hardisty& Windeatt: 1989).The traditional description of CALL is unfortunate, and they present the computer as flexible classroom aid, which can be used by teachers and learners, in and out of class, in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes.(Jones &Fortescue,1987).

Interactive CALL: By the 1990s communicative CALL began to be criticized. New second language acquisition theories and socio-cognitive views influenced many teachers and lead them to use more social and learner-centered methods. This time, emphasis was put on language use in authentic social contexts. Task-based, project-based and content-based approaches all sought to integrate learners in authentic environments, and also to integrate the various skills of language learning and use. In integrative approaches, students are enabled to use a variety of technological tools as an ongoing process of language learning and use rather than visiting the computer lab once a week basis for isolated exercises

The Main Characteristics of CALL

1-The use of a variety of interaction patterns in class: Students can work individually, in pairs, and groups, or as a whole class in CALL laboratories.

2- Information-transfer and information-and opinion-gap tasks:

a) **Information-transfer activities:** In CALL generally activities involve transferring information from one medium to another; that is, from one student to another or from one group to another group. The networked computers provide the optimum conditions for information-transfer activities.

b) **Information-gap activities:** CALL lessons frequently involve an information-gap, with one student, or group of students needing information from others in the class to complete an activity. Sometimes the computer itself has the information hidden. The programs which involve total or partial deletion are examples of activities based on such an information gap.

c) **Opinion-gap or problem-solving activities:** A number of CALL lessons are based on opinion-gap activities. The students have different opinions concerning a problem-solving scenario, such as the cheapest way of allocating resources in a spreadsheet, or a simulation. Alternatively, the difference of opinion may be over the best ending to a short story written on a word-processor. Assigning different roles to students can lead to creativity.

3-Fluency and accuracy practice one of the characteristics of many CALL programs is that the students have to pronounce or type in exactly the answer the computer expects because the computer can only accept the answers it has been programmed to accept. This limitation is very useful in practice because it provides motivation for the students to use the language as accurately as possible.

4-Computer-work, pre-computer work and post-computer work. There are three stages in CALL activities: a) Pre-computer work before students make use of the machines; b) Work done at the computer; c) Post-computer work done away from the computer (Hardisty and Windeatt: 1989).

Generally, there are four modalities of syllabi framed/ structured/ inbuilt in a CALL software to impart LSRW skills of English. Based on strategies of orientation given to the learners of English the subsequent pedagogical procedures have been identified.

Four Types of Software Used in CALL:

a) Here, the primary strategy of CALL is **Do what I tell you**. The machine controls to get a great extent the nature and order of events. This includes drills, exercises, quizzes, and tests, and at the end programmed learning it gives the student a task, such as: 'write a sentence to complete or a question to answer'. Then, it tells the student whether s/he is right or wrong and invites her/him to try again if s/he was wrong. When the student has found the right answer, s/he can go on with the next task.

b) The secondary strategy of ELT through CALL here is **Guess what was there**. All the words of a text are masked out and the student has to point to single words and buy them. The minimum number of words that the student needs in order to answer a comprehension question are displayed at the end of the text.

c) The third methodology of CALL perspective is **Can I help you?** technique. Here the software describes uses of the computer as a tool. The computer's natural role is that of a slave, obeying orders and carrying out jobs for its master on demand, and the obvious language job is word-processing. All the word-processors have a search and replace function that can be used to create practice material from any piece of text which has been typed in. For instance, the teacher can replace all the articles with XXX and then print out the text so that the learners write them back in the gaps.

d) The ultimate pedagogy of practice in CALL is **How do I get out of this?** This type consists of activities such as simulations, games, puzzles, many of which were not created for language learners at all. As seen above, CALL software is very diverse. It includes drills, tutorials, games, simulations and information databases. Good software should be easy to use and have a clear purpose. It should be based on instructional theory so that it can be used for self-study. Additional focus is the interest to be created by CALL software. To illustrate 'Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary' is one among the many software programs in the market (Higgins, 1995).

The reason to buy software is providing an integrated teaching that will: 1- provide realistic, native-speaker models of the language in a variety of media; 2- offer a language learning curriculum; 3- do a needs assessment; 4- determine the best next step for the learner and provide practice with that skill area; 5- record what the student has done, along with an evaluation; 6- be available at any time and require no additional pay (Warschauer & Healey 1998)

There are three main ways in which computers are useful in helping language learners develop reading skills. a) Incidental reading. Most of the CALL programs, whether oriented towards reading or not, involve the learner in reading text for the successful completion of the activity. b) Reading comprehension. Traditional question and answer CALL programs are used for reading comprehension as well as grammar and vocabulary development. c) Text manipulation. There are a number of ways in which computers can manipulate continuous text which involve the learner in close study of the content and structure of the text. An example might be shadow reading which provides students with authentic texts. Additionally, sentence structure, speed reading and cloze-reading are some of the alternative ways of developing reading skills.

Oral communication is very important in language learning process. Nowadays, language classrooms give considerable emphasis is given to oral activities in which learners use the language they have learned to communicate with each other. These activities include simulations, role-plays and discussion. Computer simulations provide a stimulus for such a work, as they offer both a focus for oral activity and a continually changing scenario for learners to talk about. Computers have a useful contribution to the development of oral skills if they are used wisely (Hammersmith: 1998).

Listening activities that use the computer are more complex than the other kinds of CALL materials since they involve equipment other than the computer itself. One of the simplest ways of giving practice in listening comprehension is to use a multiple-choice or fill-in program in conjunction with a cassette recorder or the latest multimedia containing a recorder. In addition to the normal feedback given after a wrong answer, the computer can let the learner hear the relevant part of the tape again. If a separate cassette recorder is used, the error message can give the learner appropriate counter numbers. Another simple technique is to use a tape with a test-reconstruction program which enables learners to reconstruct a summary of a recorded anecdote on screen by the help of the tape. Such activities not only help to integrate listening and writing skills but also evaluate learners' listening comprehension skills in a more active way than is generally possible in a non-CALL class (Jones & Fortescue: 1987). An activity for improving listening skills might be a

listening activity from 'JMS Newline Software', *The Listening Learner: Listening Comprehension, Spoken English*.

Computer software and the World Wide Web provide both students and teachers with materials which integrate language skills, as well as with separate activities for grammar, vocabulary, reading, and the like. Some grammar activities that can be done on the computer might be: matching, multiple choice, fill in the gaps or complete the following (Blackie: 1999; Sperling: 1998). Sample multiple choice grammar quizzes are provided in www.eslcafe.com. The quizzes can be done either online or after printing them.

One of the most important advantages of the growth of CALL is that software vendors (and language teachers) no longer feel bound to grammar practice as the main goal of computer use in the language classroom. The movement towards communicative teaching with computers is clearly expanding. The vocabulary software has started to be contextualized and to incorporate graphics, audio recording and playback, and video. More sophisticated error-checking can provide students real help in the feedback they receive, directing them to further practice or moving them to the next stage. Those who need extra help with those aspects of language that improve with practice can use small, focused programs to give them additional time and assistance outside the regular class time.

The writing process is another area where computers have added a great deal of value. Some programs help students in the pre-writing stage to generate and outline ideas. Most word-processors now come with spelling checkers, giving weak spellers some help in finding their errors and recognizing the correct spelling from a list of options. Further, according to Higgins (1995) pronunciation work in particular has benefited from CALL. Most pronunciation programs now incorporate some sort of voice recording and playback to let students compare their recording with a model. Most computer programs stimulate some discussion among group of learners even if oral practice is not the main purpose of the activity. Higgins suggests that the computer's main value is as an environment which allows language experiments to be carried out.

Most drills now include games, as well, using the power of the computer and competition for collaboration toward a goal, the fun factor, to motivate language learning. These programs provide a varying amount of instruction along with the games. The other advantages of CALL are: • Multimodal practice with feedback, • Individualization in a large class, • Pair or small group work on projects, • The fun factor, • Variety in the resources available and learning styles used, • Exploratory learning with large amounts of language data, • Real-life skill-building in computer use (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).

English teachers are in a constant need of additional teaching materials; therefore, the internet is an invaluable recourse for them. Since the most common objective for language learners is better communication, the internet will improve their communication skills. For the teacher aiming to provide the desirable dynamic learning environment, the need for appropriate and stimulating resources and experiences are never greater, and it is here that the Internet can make a significant and

unique contribution. A teacher can get access to English teaching support of many kinds through the WWW sites specialized in English teaching; download a wealth of information from newspapers, tourism and hobby-based WWW sites to use in class (Blackie: 1999).

Conclusion

The role of computers in language teaching has changed significantly in the last three decades. Previously, computers used in language teaching were limited to text. Simple simulations and exercises, primarily gap-filling and multiple-choice drills, abounded. Technological and pedagogical developments now allow us to integrate computer technology into the language learning process. Multimedia programs incorporating speech-recognition software can immerse students into rich environments for language practice. Concordance software with large language corpora provides students with the means to investigate language use in authentic contexts. And the Internet allows for a great number of opportunities to communicate in the target language, access textual and multimedia information, and publish for a global audience.

In sum, the internet enables students of English to:

- Correspond in English by e-mail with other classes in other parts of the world;
- Develop individual-pen-pals to write out of class time;
- Communicate in real-time chat rooms;
- Share opinions and ideas across cultures on sports, music, food, hobbies, etc.;
- Conduct international surveys for class work; • Read and listen to up to date news.

The rise of computer-mediated communication and the Internet has reshaped the uses computers for language learning at the end of the 20th century. With arrival of the Internet, the computer-both in society and in the classroom-has been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and communication (Sperling: 1998). For the first time, learners of a language can now communicate inexpensively and quickly with other learners or speakers of the target language all over the world. This communication can be either synchronous (Warshauer: 1995). The fun and the learning potential of CALL enables the students to possess control over their own learning capacity.

Therefore, an English language teacher shall consider the following:

- How do you want to use it?
- What and how is it teaching?
- How easy is it to use?
- What back-up is there?
- What methodological features does it use?
- What makes it different to learning from a book?

To state in a nutshell, the use of computers is compatible with a variety of approaches, methods and techniques of learning and teaching (Jones& Fortescue,1987).

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