Technology CALLs You Out of the Ordinary!

Dalia D., M.Phil., M.A., NET

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Abstract

The paper has a positive outlook on the introduction of computers as a teaching - learning medium at diverse levels of language education. In a **c**omputer **a**ssisted **l**anguage **l**earning (CALL) classroom, the language teacher is always at a high intellectual platform; directing and leading the students to a methodical range of activities that lead them to a better comprehension for pragmatic competence, for creative use of the language in real life situations.

Introduction

Digital technology is very much part of language learning throughout the world at all different levels, from the primary sector to adult education. The application of computers to language education encompasses a range of complex activities. Technology-integrated language classrooms allow *blended learning* (Bonk and Graham) and *virtual learning* (Engelbart) management systems endorse a new era of teaching methodology. These methods incorporate the use of technology in language learning to facilitate the instructor's role in strengthening learner engagement. In this era where technology rules the world, computers have made a triumphant entry into education and none can deny their significant benefits to teachers and students. In consequence, computers can be effectively used in language teaching for helping students to make the most of the opportunities they are exposed to in a language classroom concurrently their native language exposure is nil.

Multiple Roles of a Computer

In a language class room, a computer has multiple roles to play. It serves as a teacher, an examiner, a task attaining tool, a data source and as a communication facilitator. As a **teacher** it teaches students new language through sophisticated multimedia CD ROMS. In such programs, students can listen to dialogues or watch video clips. They can click on pictures to call up the names of the objects they see. They can speak into the microphone and immediately hear a recording of what they have

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **18:2 February 2018**
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said. The program can keep a record of their progress in language learning, the vocabulary learned and offer remedial motivation if necessary. Many of these CD ROM programs are offered as complete language courses. As an alternative to large CD ROM packages, there are several useful sites on the World Wide Web where students can get instruction and practice in language skills such as reading, listening and writing.

Computer-Aided Assessment (CAA)

Computer-Aided Assessment (CAA) plays an increasingly important role in language teaching and learning. The computer is very good at drill and practice as it tirelessly presents the learner with questions and announces if the answer is right or wrong. Though several early drill and practice programs are severely criticised for their only feedback of *right* or *wrong*, such programs are still popular with many language students at the threshold level. The learners are motivated and unthreatened by private feedbacks. Moreover, infographics and music in these programs provide a stimulating environment for language learning. Today, there are countless well-designed language games which guarantee personal development and lead students to ideal learning environments. "Real-world challenges are easier faced within a game containing effective, interactive experiences" that actively engage learners in the learning process. In a successful game-based learning environment, "choosing actions, experiencing consequences, and working toward goals allow learners to make mistakes through experimentation in a risk-free environment" (Cornillie et al. 50). If two or more students sit at the same computer, they can even generate pragmatic communication while discussing the answers together.

Computer – A Language Tool

The computer has been an indisputable success as a **language tool**. Spread sheets, databases, presentation slide generators, concordancers and web page producers have their place in the language classroom, particularly where the main curricular focus is task-based or project-work. The most important role of the computer in the language classroom is its use as a writing tool. It supports students easily to produce multiple drafts of the same piece of work. Students with messy handwriting can type a piece of work in their favourite font, format the texts easily, facilitate revision and check for spelling errors. While on-line dictionaries help with difficult words, hypertext systems allow the storage of multiple, linked texts providing explanations or commentaries on the text at hand.

Data Source

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The World Wide Web with its enormous source of information is an easier way for students to access information scattered across the internet. Data bases of information make it possible for them to browse text as a method of stimulating their reading, writing and an obligatory resource for project work. All most all computers have a built-in library, including a thesaurus and a dictionary. As an alternative to the Web source, there are many CD ROMs that present information in a more compact and easily accessible form which motivate and assist learners to explore further related information.

Computer- mediated Communication (CMC) Facilitator

Web- assisted computer is a principal medium by which students can maintain either synchronous or asynchronous communication with others at a distance. Language teachers can set up projects in collaboration with schools in another location and encourage students to take part in computer- mediated discussion. Definitely such activities will motivate students and let them to participate in many realistic language tasks. Along with being a language facilitator, computers can thus provide good learning environments by fostering social interaction and thereby contributing to language development. Immediate feedback, peer tutoring, and sharing ideas enhance speaking, reading and writing skills. Thus computer-mediated communication serves as the milestone of the recent development of interactive multimedia, audio-graphic computer teleconference, and interactive television through satellite. Language teachers can effectively use these web-accessed networks in classrooms to assist students in developing better oral skills and communicative ability by stimulating meaningful conversation in real life situations.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) has its advantages and disadvantages. Involving technology in language learning may reduce the intimacy of student – teacher relationship; it may negatively contribute to students affective feelings in the process of learning. However, technology if properly used, functions as a bridge to break the distance and to actively getting involved in the learning process. Teachers can resort to video conference to either teach or monitor the students' learning process. Through the internet, teacher or learners can obtain as many as possible sources related to the learned – language that can contribute as models of the language use in the real context, with social appropriacy. In addition, the computer can also be used as a more interactive aid generating oral communicative proficiency in target language. However, the multiplicity of the technology available may lead to confusion among the teachers on how to choose the right tool in

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language class rooms. In addition to that, it would be mandatory for them to monitor all activities involving web-accessed CMC.

In that case, the language teachers may resort to e-learning innovations which are easily accessible for educational purposes that further facilitate language acquisition, "provide realistic, native-speaker models" of the language in a variety of media "that do a needs assessment, record what the student has done along with an evaluation" (Lyster and Ranta 42). A progressive language classroom of this kind will reduce affective filters impeding language intake, which might further result in an accelerated pace of learning thereby igniting the learner's interest and desire to master the input without fail. Through its student-friendly settings, CMC can lead to a solution for lack of student participation, reluctant communication and absence of social appropriateness in communication. Thus, CALL can provide vast opportunities for students to hone and promote competence in the chosen language on an international scale.

Conclusion

CALL can be beneficial at places where teacher, time and attention are insufficient. In such situations, computers can facilitate the processes of triggering ideas in a language class. They can give feedback at any convenient moment or comment upon features of written texts and suggest necessary revisions with the assistance of a text editor. By means of computer networking, communities of students can be established. Real audiences and meaningful language goals set in authentic life situations can stimulate the development of competency in written and oral communication. To this point, a CALL environment facilitates to the need of each learner and gratifies individual learner differences.

Technical expertise and devising suitable content goals in instructional materials make the cost of generating and integrating CALL environment in classrooms expensive. Despite these problems, the use of computers for instruction is in fact growing and promises to be an increasingly important aspect of language learning in a scenario where there is a daunting students- teacher ratio and limited instructional time with restricted opportunities for authentic communication in the target language. Given these less than ideal parameters, CALL and CMC can be the answer to provide relevant, student-friendly programmes sought to integrate the various skills of language learning in realistic, socially appropriate environments.

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Dalia D., M.Phil., M.A., NET
Research Scholar, The University Library
Kerala University, Palayam
Thiruvananthapuram- 695034
Kerala
India
deepudalia@yahoo.com

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