Using Community Language Learning to Teach English Through CALL Activities

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at revisiting one of the old ELT methodologies, Community Language Learning. There is also an attempt at incorporating CALL applications in designing classroom activities based on CLL. The study looked at first adapting the CLL method to contemporary curriculum with its objectives and syllabus. Both the areas of CALL and CLL were studied intensively to understanding various features on offer. The paper then focused on designing classroom activities and supplementary CALL tools in order to deliver an existing curriculum of an ESL course.

Introduction

Advancements in science and technology generally have a wider and sometimes deeper impact on bringing in revolutionary changes into most fields. In recent years, such advancements, especially in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have brought about definitive changes in the modalities of delivering education. English Language Teaching (ELT), it can be said, did stand to gain extended enhancements in the form of teaching aids and tools from these advancements – such that a new discipline called Computer Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (CALL/CALT) emerge during the latter half of the twentieth century and was well established during recent years. CALL is still a growing field so, research work to solve various emerging problems are in great demand. This paper also focuses on CALL and it aims at exploring the possibility of designing CALL enhanced classroom activities for an existing curriculum.

Community Language Learning (CLL)

This is one of the methods that are brought under the Humanistic Approach. It looks at learning as problem solving. This method is similar to the Silent Way method. This method was short-lived. It considered the student as a complete person. In a class that adapts this method, students sit in a circle around an audio playback and recording device. Encouraged and guided by the teacher, each student takes turn to say his/her idea on a particular topic of discussion, or his/her response to a question/argument. The student's utterance is recorded and at the end of the activity, the recording is played to be listened and analysed by the students. The teacher is just a facilitator in helping the students communicate in English – the language to be learnt.

This method encourages the students to decide on what aspects of the language they wish to learn and instigates them to work in a community to achieve their objectives. The teacher acts as an adviser/counsellor and a guide; the students act as collaborators and members of a group.

The CLL method was developed by Charles A. Curran, a professor of psychology at Loyola University in Chicago. (Richards, 1986) This method defines the role of the teacher as that of a knower, and the students' role as that of a collaborator. The method draws on the counselling metaphor and refers to the teacher and the student as a counsellor and a client respectively. "According to Curran, a counsellor helps a client understand his or her own problems better by 'capturing the essence of the clients' concern ...[and] relating [the client's] affect to cognition...;' in effect, understanding the client and responding in a detached yet considerate manner" (138). In other words, the counsellor blends the client's feelings and experiences and learning.

The foreign language learners' tasks under the CLL method are (1) to apprehend the sound system of the language (2) assign fundamental meanings to individual lexical units and (3). Construct a basic grammar (Community Language Learning, 2012). "In these three steps, the CLL resembles the Natural Approach to language teaching in which a learner is not expected to speak until he has achieved some basic level of comprehension. (Krashen & Terrel, 1983).

The community Language Learning method is suitable for all levels of learners especially to the intermediate and the advanced level students as they already possess considerable amount of knowledge about various fields i.e. General Knowledge, and they also possess considerable amount of competence in the target language and the majority of them (in the case of the research subjects) find it difficult to communicate in English using their linguistic knowledge. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986: 117) "CLL advocates a holistic approach to language learning, since 'true' human learning is both cognitive and affective. This is termed whole-person learning. Such learning takes place in a communicative situation where teachers and learners are involved in 'an interaction… in which both experience a sense of their own wholeness".

Humanistic Language Teaching/Learning Approaches
Humanistic Language Teaching/Learning approaches may not be in vogue presently, however, some of the methods and techniques employed under the approach may be useful in delivering effective and truly learner centered English courses, and this research aims at exploring the possibilities and the implication of using such techniques especially in combination with Computer Assisted Language Learning. CALL, though emerged as a useful concept in ELT, is only few decades old and it is still a growing field where research projects are undertaken to find ways to optimally utilize the potential of computers in language learning.

What is CALL?
CALL is the use of computers in language learning. It is defined by Levy (1997) as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning". (p. 1) CALL utilizes a whole range of ICT applications in teaching a language through various activities ranging from the "traditional" drill-and-practice programs that characterised CALL in the 1960s and 1970s to advanced CALL applications such as those used in a virtual learning environment and Web-based distance learning. It also includes to the use of corpora and concordancers, interactive whiteboards, Computer-mediated communication (CMC), language learning in virtual worlds, and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). (Shield & Kukulska-Hulme, 2008)

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The term CALI (computer-assisted language instruction) was the original terminology given to the use of computer in learning or teaching languages. This shows how its origins began as a subset of the general term CAI (computer-assisted instruction). CALI slowly lost its appeal as it showed that language teaching was teacher centred. It should be noted that language teachers prefer a student-centred approach or significance, focusing on learning rather than instruction. Therefore, CALL began to replace CALI in the early 1980s (Davies & Higgins 1982) and it is now accepted by the growing number of professional associations worldwide. Even the term TELL which denotes Technology Enhanced Language Learning is also less preferred to CALL.

The primary focus of CALL has been to generate materials that are student centred. Such materials include either structured or unstructured, but they normally possess two main features: interactive learning and individualised learning. Teachers and a considerable number of educationists have a notion that CALL is an electronic replacement of a teacher. But, such a notion is totally wrong. CALL is basically a tool. It is an aid and not a teacher by itself. It helps teachers to facilitate the language learning process. At the same time, its potential can be easily underestimated if it is used only to reinforce what has already been learned in the classroom or as a remedial tool to help learners who require additional support.

CALL is a method of language learning/teaching that involves using electronic devices such as a computer as a tool. Therefore, language courses that use CALL should also have a properly designed and developed curriculum based on well established pedagogy – approaches, methods, and techniques. "The design of CALL materials generally takes into consideration principles of language pedagogy and methodology, which may be derived from different learning theories (e.g. behaviourist, cognitive, constructivist) and second-language learning theories such as Stephen Krashen's monitor hypothesis." ("Computer Assisted Language Learning," [CALL] 2016).

CALL can support traditional learning from a teacher. "A combination of face-to-face teaching and CALL is usually referred to as blended learning. Blended learning is designed to increase learning potential and is more commonly found than pure CALL" (Pegrum, 2009)

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is an approach to teaching and learning in which the computer and computer-based resources such as the Internet are used to present, reinforce and assess material to be learned. It usually includes a substantial interactive element. It also includes the search for and the investigation of applications in language teaching and learning. Except for self-study software, CALL is meant to supplement face-to-face language instruction, not replace it.

CALL Enhanced Classroom Activities based on Community Language Learning
Classroom activities are the final output of any attempt towards developing a course to teach English based on a certain methodology or an approach. These are the final product that students receive in the form of lessons, exercises, tasks, processes, etc in the classroom.

What are Classroom Activities?

Classroom activities are also termed classroom strategies, or teaching techniques. They are the implementation outcome of applying a method to language teaching.

A technique is implementational - that which actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well. (Anthony, 1963)

Teaching techniques can also be looked at as descriptions of classroom activities. In other words, activities that student performs in a classroom that would allow the realization of the objectives of a learning course.

The designing of a language learning course deals with the choosing and implementing approaches and methods of language teaching. In this phase, objectives of the course are framed, Syllabus is decided, course materials are gathered, or generated and organized, and roles of the teacher and the students are specified. The next phase in language teaching is the implementation phase in which classroom activities come into effect. Richards and Rodgers (2012) call this as 'Procedures' "a method is theoretically related to an approach, is organizationally determined by a design, and is practically realized in procedure." (p. 20) it is through classroom activities that the objectives of a method, that is defined primarily in terms of product or process, are attained by the organized and directed interaction of teachers, learners, and materials in the classroom. The differences in the methods are realized when classroom activities based on them take shape. Teaching activities that are designed to attain the goal of teaching vocabulary would be different from those which are designed to attain the goal of grammatical accuracy in the language. Classroom activities also help differentiate methods of language teaching from one another. Based on these factors, any classroom activity will have the following aspects that are to be considered while designing it – Purpose, Plan, Procedure, and practice.

Implementation of the Classroom Activities

The class consisted of forty students. These students belong to the first year of their Under Graduate course. They all took a paper on English as Second Language during the semester and the course followed the prescribed syllabus, the implementation was carried out as extra-curricular activity. In other words, the course work and learning related to the chosen areas where already delivered to the students in the conventional way. Therefore, the effectiveness of the activities was obtained only in the form of feedback from the students using a questionnaire. However, the feedback obtained from the students became significant as they had undergone the same topics in both the conventional method and CALL enhanced activities based on CLL.

The activities were conducted during class hours with prior permission from the administration. The students were clearly informed on the purpose and usefulness of such a activities and were requested to participate with due diligence. Each classroom activity was conducted in one class period which amounted to nine class periods. The tenth class period was utilized for obtaining the feedback on the activities.

Conclusion

The paper is effort to focus on implementing Classroom activities based on CLL to teach a prescribed syllabus. In addition to adapting CLL, the paper also focused on incorporating CALL within the framework. It should be said that it was possible to design both CALL applications and CLL based activities to teach a prescribed syllabus and incorporate both together. The implementation of the activities to a group of students was also successful, and from the feedback given by the students, it is evident that the activities were able to meet the expectations of the students in helping them improve their language skills besides boosting their confidence and self-worth. In this regard, it should be noted that CALL enhanced classroom activities based on CLL to teach ESL can be effective in delivering the Standard English courses.

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