INTEGRATING CALL INTO THE EFL CLASSROOM

Merita Ismaili

A South East European University, Macedonia
E-Mail: merita.ismaili@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract. *Many researches has shown that using CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) in teaching EFL (English as Foreign Language) can lead towards an effective learning outcome where students can practice the language in an interactive and authentic manner, with the help of multi-media. CALL enhances students' achievement, while at the same time 'increases motivation and autonomy in learning' (Doughty 2003, p 57).*
This study will try to investigate students' attitudes towards CALL and how it can accommodate students' different learning needs and keep them motivated. Nowadays, English needs to be taught with a focus on communicative approach meaning that there is a need to look at the learning outcomes that technology in teaching brings. The teaching techniques presented in the class should give students the necessary skills to use the target language outside the classroom as well. There are many technology tools which can help students to store the acquired concepts and information into their long-term memory.

Key words: *Computer Assisted Language Learning, students' autonomy, technology*

1. INTRODUCTION

CALL in teaching EFL is used as a tool which helps to improve students' communicative competence. At the same time it provides an opportunity to use the computer network within and outside the classroom in order to exchange the acquired learning information and share students' ideas and attitudes related to the different language tasks like discussion forums or collaborative writing.

Computer assisted language (CAL) is considered as a new trend in ELT and it is beneficial to students because it ensures improved achievement of communication within and outside the classroom. This is due to an exposure of information on the web that can be relied upon. Asynchronous way of communication allows students to use the computer for sending emails, post their ideas on the assigned discussion forums and create bulletin boards and blogs. On the other hand, the synchronous communication allows students to communicate directly while they are online and it can be used between one person and a group of people who can interact from a distance. This way of communication is often used by teachers to improve students' collaborative writing among whole class task assignments. CALL mainly focuses on providing the students with the opportunity to learn at their own pace, using interactive lessons that are either structured or unstructured. The learning materials found in CALL are put in to use by language teachers to facilitate his or her lessons, reinforce the learners' previous knowledge and also help students who have low or limited mastery in languages to use CALL for remedial learning so as to increase their proficiency of the language. The SEE University is in a huge advantage regarding the use and employment of the technological tools. It uses unique software,

which is called "LIBRI" and its primary use is to help and foster students autonomy by using its' on-line services such as: participation in different discussions, posting activities, blogs, chatting, uploading teaching materials etc. It offers many tools that manage and promote learning and can be used as platform to conduct fully online courses or blended learning to supplement face-to-face courses. All students at SEEU are required to use "LIBRI" in their courses. The SEEU teachers are also required to use this software in their course design, as well to promote it in their teaching. They are required to constantly use its features, ask students to actively participate in on-line discussions, post different activities, set homework, revise papers and take evidence on students' academic progress.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Warschauer (2000) believes that CALL has been designed to take into account the *Krashen's Monitoring Theory*, which deals with the relationship between acquisition and learning. It defines the influence of the other language theories such as behaviorist theory, cognitive and the constructivist theory.

Chapelle (2001) states that there are many important features which enabled the functioning of CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) leading to creation of important conditions necessary for ELT like: modification of output, negotiation of meaning, meta-cognitive awareness and self-correction. Gips (2004) concluded that students are able to flashback what they learned through the assistance of CMC with the presence of interaction. CMC leads to creation of a new surrounding that has features required for creation and exchange of information, which is necessary for students who want to learn a foreign language. The students are able to improve their lexical language because they get the meaning of words through negotiation. The change that occurs in the lexical language leads to development of vocabulary that is not included in classroom. These studies have been able to give relationship between verbal communication and on-line interactions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research will try to examine students` attitudes towards the use of technology in their classes and help teachers become familiar with using CALL as a tool in their process of teaching This study attempts to answer these questions:

1. In which way CALL enhances students' autonomy?
2. Are students more motivated to learn English in a CALL environment?

The participants in this study are 60 undergraduate SEEU students; their age is 22-30. They take the General English (GE), intermediate level course as a required subject of their study curricula. Even though they are placed at the same group their level of proficiency differs because their background knowledge differs as well. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions is used as an instrument in order to get feedback related to students' attitudes regarding the use of CALL. After each question there was a space for students' additional comments.

Table 1 Student attitudes towards CALL

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I enjoy using online dictionaries, translator tools and other CALL equipments during the GE class	13	35	2	5	5
2. I believe that I can learn English faster when I use the computer	20	20	3	8	9
3. Computer activities give me more chances to practice English.	14	40	3	3	/
4. I am more motivated by the task presented in computerized forms than the traditional way	10	46	1	3	/
5. Computers help to adjust my pace of learning	43	7	5	5	/
6. I use CALL activities outside the classroom	40	10	/	8	2
7. Computer assisted learning advanced my critical thinking	6	44	5	5	/
8. Using computer activities and internet is a good way to improve English vocabulary	16	43	1	/	/
9. I constantly post on blogs and discussion forums	10	46	/	3	/
10. CALL enhances students' autonomy	38	19	/	2	1
11. I use the computer to complete my assignments	3	45	12	/	/
12. I feel more confident when using computer to communicate my teachers and classmates, than class discussions.	12	40	5	7	/
13. Finding information on the internet improved my research skills	3	40	5	2	/
14. I improved my presentation skills using the computer	10	48	2	/	/
15. On line activities should be used in English skills syllabus	6	43	10	/	/

4. RESULTS

On the question *"I enjoy using online dictionaries, translator tools and other CALL equipments during the GE class"*, 23% students *strongly agreed*, 59% *agreed* with the statement and said that by these computer applications they are "forced" to learn the new language, expressions and terms in order to be able to communicate or search the information. They mentioned the importance of on-line dictionaries, as well as translator

tool, which again, help them become more efficient when then deal with their assigned tasks. Only 5% were *uncertain* and 14% students *disagreed* that they can learn English faster when they use computer. The results of the 3rd question *"Computer activities give me more chances to practice English"* show that only 5% were *uncertain* and 5% of the students *disagreed* that computer gives them more chances to practice English while 68% *agreed* that using computer activities have helped them, and 23% *strongly agreed* that computer activities give them more chances to practice English. Different blogs and social services help student communicate with native English speakers, read and listen authentic materials. A similar result was achieved on the 4th question *"I am more motivated by the task presented in computerized forms than the traditional way"* where students believed that they are more motivated by the task presented in computerized forms than the traditional way. Only 5% of the students *disagreed* and 18% *strongly agreed*, 78% *agreed* that they enjoy using computers during their learning activities, assigned tasks, and that computers are easy to use. Students are more motivated when the teaching material is presented with audio and visual effects. The results show that questions 5 and 6 *"Computers help to adjust my pace of learning"* and *"I use CALL activities outside the classroom"* were related to each other. 73% of the students said that with the help of this tool they can easily adjust their learning pace, and 68% declared that they enjoy using computers outside the classroom as well. This is mostly because the teaching becomes more student-oriented. Listening activities make best use of through computer activities since students are given an opportunity to repeat as many times as they want and again adjust their own pace, which is very difficult in a traditional language classroom. On the 7th question which was more specific as it asked students to five their opinion whether computer assisted learning advanced their critical thinking, most of students 73% *agreed* while 9% *disagreed*, 8% were *uncertain* and 10% *strongly* agreed with the statement. In addition to computer as tutor Blake (2004) uses the expression computer as stimulus .In this case he wanted to point out that the role of CALL is not only having students write the correct answer, but its purpose is also to encourage students to participate in online discussions, improve their writing skills and enhance their critical thinking. The results from the 8th question revealed that 27% of students *strongly agreed* and 73% *agreed* that using computer activities and internet is a good way to improve English vocabulary. Many researches has showed that the most effective way of teaching students the vocabulary is through visualization, and illustrate what the word means. This approach can easily be done by applying different technology tools that CALL offers. For question 9 *"I enjoy using the computer to communicate with other students"*, only 5% of the students disagreed while other 77% *agreed* and 18% *strongly agreed*. One of the greatest advantages of using computers is that students don't feel the anxiety and the frustration to communicate with each other (Kitade, 2000). Another advantage is that they can contact more people at the same time and any time they want. This question supports the 10th question which was related to using the computers to communicate with the teachers. 32% of students *agreed* and 64% of them strongly agreed that computers are useful tools to communicate with their teachers as well. For question 11 *"CALL enhances students' autonomy"* 5% *strongly* agreed, 74% agreed and 21% *were uncertain*. They can work independently and check their progress easily. Similar result, as to above mentioned question, was attained on 13th question were 68% agreed and 9% were uncertain, while 5% strongly agreed that finding information on the internet improved their research skills. Using CALL had great improvement in the skills of collecting and analyzing information. When searching the internet students are

equipped with information literacy skills (Levy, 2007); they go through an information seeking process, develop their own research process (Blake, 2004) and finally, students learn to present their findings (De la Fuente, 2003). Regarding the 14th question, there was no doubt that they had improved their presentation skills using the computer. Overhead transparencies (OHTs) and computer slide shows (e.g. PowerPoint) are the most used forms of the visual aid. On the last question students were asked whether CALL needs to be included in GE syllabi 73% confirmed while 18% were uncertain. From the results obtained at this phase of the study, it can be seen that the tendency in the field of English Language Teaching is oriented on students' autonomy, their involvement, student-generated syllabi, creation of relaxed atmosphere for learning, and need-based learning. As the above results revealed CALL can support updated trends in ELT and make the GE classes more interesting and interactive.

5. CONCLUSION

This research's objective was to identify students' perceptions on the effectiveness on using CALL in language learning. Students use the computers primarily for educational and research purposes. It provides extensive opportunities to accomplish students' research, assignments, presentation and helps them learn the language better and faster. Computer assisted language learning motivates students, advances their critical thinking and enhances students autonomy. The English skills courses should put emphasis on using CALL as part of their teaching tool.

Thus it can be inferred that the 'mastery of language' is considered as prerequisite in making good progress in studies (thus present needs) and in getting a good job in future and also making good progress in a future career. Students need a classroom environment equipped with computers which will be supportive to their active participation and CALL usage. They need to improve their abilities to involve CALL in finding appropriate materials for their research and project papers. Students attach great importance regarding the use of CALL. They believe that the present approach and course material is not contributing to the improvement of their English. They have a favorable opinion to the suggestion that a modern approach can be helpful in improving their learning of English and that it should be adopted. Nowadays, the teacher is not the main provider of the new presented information in the classroom. The students can easily access that information by searching the net. For this reason, the teachers need to focus on using different tools and techniques which will produce a measurable output and at the same time keep students motivated to participate and interact.

REFERENCES

Blake, Robert. "Computer mediated communication: A window on L2 Spanish interlanguage." *Language Learning & Technology* 4, no. 1 (2000): 120-136.
Chapelle, Carol. *Computer applications in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
Doughty, Catherine, and Michael Long. "Optimal psycholinguistic environments for distance foreign language learning." (2003).

Fuente, María J. "Is SLA interactionist theory relevant to CALL? A study on the effects of computer-mediated interaction in L2 vocabulary acquisition."*Computer Assisted Language Learning* 16, no. 1 (2003): 47-81.

Gips, Amy, Philip A. DiMattia, and James Gips. *The effect of assistive technology on educational costs: Two case studies*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2004.

Groot, Peter JM. "Computer assisted second language vocabulary acquisition."*Language Learning & Technology* 4, no. 1 (2000): 60-81.

Kitade, Keiko. "L2 learners' discourse and SLA theories in CMC: Collaborative interaction in Internet chat." *Computer assisted language learning* 13, no. 2 (2000): 143-166.

Klaus, Joachim. *Computers helping people with special needs*. Springer, 2004.

Levy, Michael. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Context and Conceptualization*. Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016-4314, 1997.

Warschauer, Mark. "Online communication." *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (2001): 207-212.