

# **The Evaluation of Using Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Facilities in Developing EFL Among Islamic Azad University Practitioners: The Case of Computer Literacy**

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## **Abstract**

The present study investigated the university practitioners' attitudes towards using computer assisted language learning (CALL) in teaching English language at Islamic Azad universities of Khuzestan Province. This study was also to examine the English as foreign language (EFL) MA and PhD teachers' computer literacy and its effects on using CALL facilities in English classrooms. The participants of this study were 135 university teachers at the Islamic Azad Universities (i.e., 12 Branches). The research instrument was a questionnaire extracted from Shin and Son (2007) in 5-point Likert scale. Findings showed that that there was lack of technological equipment for using CALL.

**Keywords:** CALL Facilities, University Practitioners, Iranian Context, Computer Literacy

## **1. Introduction**

Using Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been regarded as a revolution affecting all areas of human life throughout the language learning history. The computer as a tool is used in order to facilitate learning of language (Hubbard, 2010). It is powerless and has no inborn wisdom; no initiative and inherent ability to learn or to teach and it is totally the servant of the user, and it is dependent on the teacher in many cases. For example, it is impossible to create educational materials without the help of the teacher. All the teaching, linguistic materials and instructions must be specified by the teacher. It is the teacher decides what degree of control the computer will have in his/her classes (Chapelle, 2001). The relatively new and interdisciplinary CALL draws on quite an amount of diverse disciplines, theories and fields that can be grouped into five categories: psychology, artificial intelligence, computational linguistics, instructional technology and human-computer interaction studies (Hubbard & Siskin, 2004; Levy, 1997).

CALL instruction was a theory of instruction centered on the teaching process; however, with the noticeable shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, second language acquisition (SLA) was of paramount importance (Hubbard & Siskin, 2004). Unfortunately, SLA's reflections on CALL have been far from transparent as there is 'no generally accepted theory of SLA to embrace with confidence' (Fox, 1993, p. 101) and there are at least forty theories, models, perspectives, metaphors, hypotheses, and theoretical claims in the SLA literature (Beretta, 1991, Hashemi & Aziznezhad, 2011).

As a CALL technology Interactive Videodisc (IVD) shares the main characteristics of multimedia CALL, Doughty (1991) states that comprehension-based models of SLA, the negotiated Interaction model and the Cognitive Processing Model of SLA, offer the greatest potential to

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researchers and materials developers. Chapelle (2005) recommends that the interactionist approach to SLA and discourse analysis for the study of CALL provide more solid grounding for CALL research relative to other areas of applied linguistics.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, psychology started to change from a behavioristic approach to cognitive one. Cognitive psychology regarding CALL includes the study of attention, pattern recognition, memory, language, reading, writing, and problem solving (Best, 1989) in using virtual interaction. The modern development of cognitive psychology has been strongly influenced by the information processing approach, developments in computer science, especially artificial intelligence (AI), and developments in linguistics. Moreover, the notion of schemata or script is a central concept in cognitive view. According to Doughty (1991), comprehension consists of three stages: locating a schema that appears to match the linguistic input, finding the elements of the input that correlate to the roles of schema, and making inferences to cover the gaps.

The value of CALL can be seen in the aspects that multimedia and linguistic input activates the schemata enabling stronger connections. Thus it enhances memory and learning. CALL activities provide automaticity and restructuring (Drasgow, Levine & McLaughlin, 1987), and students' work can be easily tracked through information processing approach (Levy, 1997).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Merits of Using CALL**

The use of CALL tutorials and tools in and out of the classroom provides new opportunities to promote language development by improving reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills together with grammar, vocabulary knowledge

and pronunciation. They include infinite source, materials and aids that students can build on their language learning focusing on each skill or focusing on the language as a whole (Dashtestani, 2012; Mohammadi, 2012).

Jones and Fortescue (1988) note that computers help students develop their reading skills in three ways: incidental reading, reading comprehension and text manipulation in which learners read the text with the purpose of completing the activities successfully, answer traditional comprehension questions and study a text in terms of content and structure. Healey (1999) also agree that computers may be beneficial in developing the reading skills such as skimming, scanning, recognizing details, main ideas, topic sentences, predicating what will come next. Moreover, word processing programs facilitate their writing as they automatically check the spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. Through various communicative and interactive activities, computer technology can help language learners strengthen their linguistic skills, affect their learning attitude, promote motivation, and build their self-instruction strategies and self-confidence (Zamani, 2010).

The use of different computer tests for each student may minimize any special practice effects, studying for the test and cheating (Drasgow, Levine, & McLaughlin, 1987). Diagnostic feedback can be provided very quickly and effectively to each student on his or her incorrect answers. Such feedback can even be fairly descriptive if artificial intelligence is used (Baker, 1989; Bunderson, Inouye & Olsen, 1988).

## **2.2. Demerits of CALL**

CALL may also face several demerits of implementing computers as a medium of education system which provides a liberal breakthrough; still has its shortcomings and disadvantages. These shortcomings include financial

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problems, hardware, software problems and internet connection problems, and users' fatigue and loss of concentration (Warschauer, 2002, 2004). Gips, DiMatta, and Gips (2004) indicated that the first disadvantage of computer and its attached language learning programs is that they will increase educational costs and harm the equity of education. On the other hand, unless both the teachers and students are competent in utilizing computers to a certain extent, the potential success of the program will not be achieved. If they lack the basic technology knowledge, they should be offered training course in the use of computer technology. Insufficient competence of computers may lead to negative attitudes towards the computers and language as well (Dhaif, 2004).

This study was conducted based on the use of CALL which have mentioned in the literature of this research. The motivation behind this study was to uncover teachers' attitudes using CALL in Khuzestan universities, teachers' computer literacy in teaching English, and teachers' knowledge of computer facilities of universities. It also intended to investigate and evaluate CALL facilities used in EFL classes. This study aimed to find out the answers to the following research question which asks the condition of using CALL in academic setting and the university teachers' attitudes toward using CALL in EFL classrooms.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Design of the Study**

The study was conducted based on a post facto design as a descriptive method and aimed to investigate the factors that affect implementation of CALL from teachers' perspectives. This study used a questionnaire adapted from Shin and Son (2007) which investigates effects of CALL in developing EFL learners' language knowledge.

### **3.2. Participants**

This study was conducted in both governmental and non-governmental universities of Khuzestan where university teachers who teach English in 12 Islamic Azad Universities of Khuzestan. 135 EFL university teachers, who participated in filling in the questionnaire, were selected based on non-random convenient sampling method from Islamic Azad Universities based on their availability in the academic year of 2016-2017. The university teachers were teaching EFL and held the certificate of MA (n=110), and PhD (n=25) degrees. The teachers were teaching EFL in the first year of the academic year. All the participants were teaching or studying Teaching or Linguistics courses. They were willingly participated in the research and were informed that they were able to leave the research processes if they wanted. The age range of the participants was from 21 to 68 with a mean age of 47.

### **3.3. Instrumentation**

In this study, a 15-item questionnaire was extracted from Shin and Son (2007) and administrated in order to collect data among EFL university teachers. It was used to collect male and female teachers' perceptions and perspectives on the use of CALL as a new tool for better implementation of EFL teaching. The questionnaire consisted of three sections; the first section includes 16 personal and educational items aimed to collect the profile of the participants' background such as their age, gender, degree, teaching experience, using CALL at home and classroom, and reasons for using it, and their level of familiarity with CALL.

### **3.3.1. Questionnaire**

In the questionnaire of CALL was designed for university teachers following Shin and Son (2007). It comprised of 15 items which asked 4-Likert typed scale on the use of CALL among university teachers. The mail issues which were included in the questionnaire including problems of CALL application, the teachers' needs of using technology, computer literacy and the availability of the CALL facilities. It was designed based on Shin and Son's (2007) questionnaire and it was modified for actual use in Iranian context. Its reliability was calculated through Cronbach Alpha as ( $\alpha=.706$ ) and its face and content validity were assured by means of the confirmation of three experts in teaching EFL.

### **3.4. Procedure**

The questionnaire of the present study was extracted from Shin and Son (2007) with some modifications. The reason of using the questionnaire as the research instrument is that it requires little time, there is no extended writing, they are easy to process, make group comparisons easy, and are useful for testing the specific hypotheses. Thus the modified questionnaire included 15-Likert-scale items ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. It was used to assess the teachers' attitude and can be defined to be a useful and effective mean of determining opinions and attitudes. The calculation included the measurement of teachers' attitude mean in each item and its percentage. This questionnaire was designed to assess the use of CALL in the classrooms; however, we modified it to be adjusted in the research of the effect of CALL on teaching EFL. It included 20 items in two sections for teachers and learners. In this case, we could elicit the teachers and students' knowledge on CALL and its

application in the classroom. Then it was distributed to EFL teachers and learners at the universities in Khuzestan (where English is taught at BA, MA and MA levels) in the first year of 2016-2017 academic year and they returned it within two weeks. The collected data were analyzed through descriptive statistics including the calculation of teachers' attitude means and percentages.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Teachers' Attitudes towards CALL

For eliciting information about the teachers' attitudes toward CALL, the teachers' questionnaire was employed. The descriptive results of the teaching questionnaire are depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1. Teachers' Attitudes on Using CALL in Their Academic Settings**

Items	Mean	%
1. I have Internet problems of CALL application like lack of the Internet or slow Internet.	3.20	80
2. University teachers' needs technology of CALL for teaching EFL	3.67	91
3. CALL resources can replace textbooks	1.66	41
4. I have enough computer literacy	1.24	31
5. ESL/EFL Websites are useful for teaching English.	3.42	85
6. Students can be motivated by the use of CALL in the classroom.	2.95	73
7. Students can improve their English skills through the use of CALL.	3.10	77
8. Students can learn how to use CALL resources for learning English for themselves.	2.84	71
9. CALL is available in my university for teaching courses	1.47	36
10. Teachers can enhance language learning skills through CALL	3.50	87
11. I am responsible for the success of CALL.	1.58	39
12. I am competent to use CALL-based materials in the classroom.	1.11	27
13. I know how to integrate CALL resources in to existing classroom curricula.	1.69	42
14. I need training to improve my CALL literacy skills.	3.25	81
15. I would like to use CALL-based materials and activities in my classroom as much as possible.	3.46	86



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Table 1 shows that the responses teachers gave are calculated through mean scores and percentages in this section. Then a description of the results of the questionnaire is analyzed by considering the attitude questionnaire. These general attitudes toward the effectiveness of using CALL are statistically presented and their problems have been shown in the table on the use of CALL in their language classrooms. Their responses can be divided into three categories: (1) lack of CALL facilities and slow Internet, (2) the need to use technology and CALL in their classrooms, and (3) the readiness of the university teachers to use CALL in their teaching curriculum of the language instruction.

#### **4.2. Analysis of Data**

The participants of the study believe that the main problem is the lack of enough technology in the classrooms and the shortage of infrastructures of using CALL in their classroom, *“University teachers’ needs technology of CALL for teaching EFL”* (Mean=3.67, 91%), the need for CALL and computer literacy, *“I need training to improve my CALL literacy skills”* (Mean=3.25, 81%), and slow internet in the universities and lack of access to electronic journal, *“I have Internet problems of CALL application like lack of the Internet or slow Internet”* (Mean= 3.20, 80%) which is significantly high.

They also believe that the use of CALL in the classrooms could be beneficial for teaching language skills, *“ESL/EFL Websites are useful for teaching English”* (Mean= 3.42, 85%). The teachers also believe that using CALL cannot be replaced the textbooks, *“CALL resources can replace textbooks”* (Mean=1.66, 41%). This shows that the teachers do not agree that they can use the CALL classes fully and ignore the traditional classes and paper-materials. They also think that they need much information on using

CALL and modern technology to be more competent in using CALL in their classroom. Their idea on the item, “*I have enough computer literacy*” (Mean=1.24, 31%), Shows that they are far from using CALL in their classrooms. ESL/EFL Websites are useful for teaching English. The majority of teachers think that the Web-sites are useful tools for learning and teaching and note that, “*ESL/EFL Websites are useful for teaching English*” (Mean=3.42, 85%). More than 50 percent of the teachers’ attitudes agree with the role of CALL in helping the learners find pedagogical sources for learning English language sine they note that, “*Students can learn how to use CALL resources for learning English for themselves*” (Mean= 2.84, 71%). However, the fact is this that the teachers disagree with the statement that, “*I am responsible for the success of CALL*” (Mean=1.58, 39%). This shows that the majority of teachers are not aware of the importance of their responsibility on gaining the computer literacy and helping the learners to achieve such knowledge. The teachers response to the statement that notes, “*I am competent to use CALL-based materials in the classroom*” (Mean=1.11, 27%), shows that the teachers believe they are not familiar with teaching through CALL and computer in the classrooms. They need to be trained in using e-materials and pedagogical Web sites in the classrooms. The teachers also believe that they are not competent enough to find and use CALL pedagogical resources and use them in the classroom since the note that, “*I know how to integrate CALL resources in to existing classroom curricula*” (Mean=1.96, 42%).

The majority of teachers’ (70%) responses indicate that CALL can enhance language learning and motivate EFL students because it offers them another environment to study English beside classroom instruction. Teachers also agree with the importance of using CALL and emphasized that the EFL students could find a great deal of activities and exercises online. They also can

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download language-related exercises for the four skills, online dictionaries and articles for their research projects. Although surfing the internet fosters learning independently, most teachers believe that both teachers and students still need guidance and supervision on using CALL effectively. Learning independently was being achieved gradually as one of the teachers commented.

Moreover, they note that the university officials should think of the teachers' computer literacy and the use of CALL in their teaching curriculum. The response to availability of CALL in their classrooms, "*CALL is available in my university for teaching courses*" received the minimum rate (Mean=1.47, 36%) which is moderately low. However, the teachers note that the students may find their classes motivating, "*Students can be motivated by the use of CALL in the classroom*" (Mean=2.95, 73%), the learners may face difficulties in using most of this computer class time to covering the syllabus.

The results of this study agree with Lee (2000) who states that this rapid evolution has inevitably challenged language pedagogy enabling and, indeed, demanding new means of instruction. In language teaching, new approaches, methods, methodologies, strategies and tools should be scrutinized and integrated into the curriculums in a well-organized method in order to cope with the vast changing world. One way for teachers to integrate information technology in to their classrooms is using CALL through software programs, CDs, websites or blogs.

New technological tools may provide authentic tasks that students can engage in and develop their language skills in meaningful and real life activities that can also be more enjoyable for young language learners. The results of the present study are in line with Lewis (1999) who notes that the language learners may participate in CALL exercises independently. They can write comments on the blogs about music, films, and books. They can also have a discussion board

or interactive whiteboard each week. They can chat or send e-mails to each other and even to native speakers in other countries. Peer feedback can also be used as an activity to receive appropriate linguistic responses. It also provides stress free atmosphere that shy students can highly benefit from. The students may feel more comfortable and less anxious while studying with computers.

It must be stated that one of the most important factors in CALL use is teachers' influence. A number of researchers (e.g., Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2009; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008) have found that there is a strong connection between the teacher and the learners' motivation, achievement, negative feelings and effort. The results of these studies highlight the fact that the teacher's level of enthusiasm and commitment is one of the most important factors that affect the learners' motivation (Dornyei, 2005).

The results of this study clarifies that the teachers' attitudes toward CALL are dramatically affecting learners' judgment of using technology. These results are matched with Pourhosein Gilakjani and Sabouri (2014) who note that the teachers need to be competent in using computers and enthusiastic about using them. They should have positive attitudes on using computerized equipment if they want their students to work with CALL. Teachers' attitudes towards computers define their attitude towards CALL.

## **5. Conclusion**

Teachers' responses indicated that if they were CALL competent, they would give online feedback to students if they submitted their assignments online. However, the teachers' responses show that they preferred to make comments on the hard copies of students' writings or text books. Teachers' responses depicted that they did not participate more in the computer classes as in-service teacher training. They showed fewer experiences of teaching and learning

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online or in the CALL-based classrooms. The teachers should be trained in using CALL and the teaching curriculum should allow them to use it in the classrooms. Teaching EFL lacks such a program in using CALL in the English classes in Iranian setting.

There is a need for further research in Iranian context to investigate whether there is a transitional or developmental environment of using CALL is available in the educational setting. This may be felt more since the Iranian colleges and universities have been newly equipped with some computer laboratories and CALL classes. The teachers' motivation to use CALL in their classes should be investigated, especially when these facilities are prepared by the university officials not only in EFL classes but also in the courses other than English language classrooms.

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