

# **A RESEARCH IN CALL (COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING) DURING THE ENGLISH CLASS**

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## **WHAT IS CALL?**

Lately, there have been a lot of changes and developments in education as in all life fields and they have lead to the appearance of certain needs. As technology has developed, computers have become an important part of our lives and of education, too. In a broad sense, 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, support and assess the language material to be learned. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a multidisciplinary area of research, as it can have application intended only for grammar learning and practice, vocabulary reinforcement or just reading or listening comprehension. CALL is generally viewed as a subcategory of Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI). While CAI is teaching and learning through computer interaction for all disciplines, CALL focuses particularly on language instruction.

CALL had its start between the 1950s and 1960s and has undergone a various number of transformations divided into three distinct phases:

- *Behaviouristic CALL* – starting with the 1950s up to the 1960s and developing programs in which most of the activities were repetitive language drills, also known as drill-and-practice. The most predominant CALL programs during this time were CALL tutoring systems devised and implemented for mainframe computers.
- *Communicative CALL* – appeared by the late 1970s when affordable and powerful personal computers (PCs) allowed a wide range of educational opportunities with technology.
- *Integrative CALL* - in the late 1980s and early 1990s coincided with the re-evaluation of communicative language teaching theory and practice. Teachers were searching for methods to

teach in a more integrative way with task-based, project-based and content-based approaches in authentic environments.

With the introduction of the Internet, CALL has reached a new era, offering many facilities, helping users obtain information and resources. The Internet was first introduced by The Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), an army of the United States Government working mainly on defence-related technological developments. With the help of advanced technology, especially the Internet, many things have changed. The development of easier connections, more user-friendly interfaces and cheaper access has opened up the way to everyone from young children at home and at school to professionals in all fields of life.

The most common communication tools are electronic mail, blogs and message boards, though, lately, Internet chat and Internet conferencing come fast from behind. It is believed that the term CALL is now synonymous with TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) because of the extensive use of technology in many different areas of education. It involves activities such as exploitation of internet resources, development and use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), speech recognition and language processing.

There are several applications of CALL, but it is hard to expect all applications to have been successful due to several factors involved in CALL learning, the most important being the teacher and the learner and the functions it is used for: teaching, reinforcing vocabulary, revising items or just skill practice.

## **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING COMPUTERS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The fact that computers can theoretically bring a potential to language learning and teaching has caused much of the excitement surrounding CALL. The studies conducted on CALL support the idea that computer technology plays a major role in foreign language learning and instruction.

Students bring different levels of motivation, learning styles and language competences to the classroom. One of the greatest potentials of a well-designed language learning program is its ability to individualize instruction. Student-centred, customized software that allows students to decide how to proceed is consistent with the idea that people learn best through their own

initiative and self-motivation. Chapelle<sup>1</sup> states that CALL has ‘*more potential for individualizing instruction when compared to any other resource.*’ For example, a CALL program can be designed to direct a student to different language levels depending on his/her computer responses. If students make repetitive language errors while engaged in a CALL activity, the computer software can be programmed to direct the learner to further explanations and practice. It has the ability to focus on the individualized needs, interests, strengths and weaknesses, motivation, and learning styles of the L2 student.

It is considered that the potential of CALL software programs and the Internet to provide samples of meaningful, authentic and realistic communication is especially beneficial to language learners. When the target language is in a foreign environment, as learning English in Romania, CALL programs may be the only source of authentic speech models available to learners. Audio and video clips accessed through a CALL program allow students to listen and watch native speakers in realistic, meaningful, natural and culturally appropriate situations.

Although there is great potential for CALL to enhance language learning, there are also economic, educational, and technical obstacles that prevent the successful integration of computers into language teaching. Some of these obstacles include the high costs of computer equipments, lack of quality CALL programs, skepticism concerning the effectiveness of computer-assisted instruction, the need to adapt to the changing roles of teachers and computers and inadequate professional development for teachers using CALL.

No matter the drawbacks, CALL remains a powerful tool for improving foreign language learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapelle, Carol A. (2002): ‘*Computer-Assisted Language Learning*’ in Kaplan, Robert B. (Ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 498 - 505.