

Implementing A Computer Assisted Language Learning Training Program for English Teachers

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Abstract

The trend of acquiring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has encouraged different educational institutions to develop strategic plans and directions for its onsite implementation and evaluation in order to promote the quality of instruction, enhance student achievement, and better inform and promote society. This paper focuses on the challenge of creating a CALL training program for English faculty members at a major university in Saudi Arabia. The goal of the program was to introduce CALL to English teachers and evaluate its effectiveness on their attitudes towards the integration of technology in their classes. A group of English teachers ($n = 30$) who were involved in teaching advanced level classes participated in a multiple-phase training program for seven weeks. The analysis of the data from a survey and a semi-structured interview revealed that the participating teachers developed positive beliefs towards the use of CALL in their classes. Although a majority of teachers believed that the skilled use and integration of CALL could lead to more effective language teaching, they reported that lack of appropriate technical, financial, and training supports could be the factors that inhibit the effective implementation of CALL in EFL classes. In the end, several implications of the findings for English language institutes, program administrators, and English teachers at Saudi universities were discussed.

Keywords: CALL, EFL, ELI, teacher training, Saudi Arabia

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1. Introduction

While the use of computer-based technological applications and tools in language learning programs has been extensively investigated (Chen, 2014; Li, 2012; Liu, 2009; Nami & Marandi, 2014; Smyth, 2011; Wu & Marek, 2010), little attention has so far been paid to the teachers' contribution and their perceptions of incorporating technology into their instruction. This is, however, more evident in EFL contexts (Aydin, 2013; Celik, 2013), where the conventional approaches to language teaching are still prevalent. Indeed, teaching new generation of students can be challenging for the teachers who are not technologically literate or well prepared for the challenging job of employing technology in their classes (Prensky, 2001). In other words, while the educational institutions have to integrate technology into their programs, teachers need to learn how to keep up with and integrate technology into their instruction. Barksdale (1996) argued that it is the responsibility of the institutes to offer teachers the means of integrating technology into their work. However, to help teachers integrate such technology into their teaching demands adequate and suitable technology-based training and support (Ebsworth, Kim & Klein, 2010).

Among the services the educational institutes can offer, Blanco (1996) referred to computers and wire offices with telecommunications capabilities for electronic mail and access to the Internet. These facilities have already been installed at English Language Institute, (ELI) King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Saudi Arabia for the staff and faculty. As per the new policy, ELI has linked the language teaching classes to the new blackboard teaching system, and it is compulsory for faculty to use and facilitate the students' language learning using this system. In addition, the university provides incentives and allows teachers to attend conferences and symposiums in technology and technology-related issues. Despite these provisions, the use of CALL in English language teaching is still limited to a few teachers who predominantly use it as a drill-and-practice software. There are several limiting factors that affect the use of CALL at ELI. The most significant factor noticed is that most of the faculty members have little or no training in the use of CALL for EFL instruction. In fact, the main factor hindering the use of CALL in this educational context is a lack of training for the teachers. While previous research in the Middle-Eastern context (e.g., Albilirini, 2006; Al-Kahtani, 2001) reported that the faculty members held positive attitudes towards the use of computers for EFL instruction, a big number of instructors at ELI have not received any CALL training before getting appointed at KAU.

The purpose of this article is to present a new training scheme for EFL faculty members at KAU based on the information gathered by the researcher in the last couple of years as a faculty member. The idea of introducing CALL at ELI was considered because this school is still facing practical problems that prevent the faculty from using available software and hardware effectively in EFL instruction. The target audience of the proposed CALL training program is ELI faculty at Women's main campus in Fall Semester 2014–15. The main goal of this project is to propose and implement a CALL training program for the female faculty members to facilitate their use of CALL in teaching English.

2. Literature Review

The rapid development of technology in different spheres of today's life has attracted the educators' attention to use it for educational purposes (Aydin, 2013). Since 1960s, different pre-service and in-service training programs have focused on training teachers to use multimedia applications and computer-based technologies in their classrooms (Milone, 1996). However, the effective and efficient use of technology for educational purposes depends on

many factors (Bordbar, 2010; Park & Son, 2009). One of these influential factors is the teachers' awareness and ability to use technology in their classes. Kinnaman (1995) believed that, "Teachers and technology each have vitally important, but different, roles to play in education" (p. 96). In other words, it could be argued that training in the use and integration of technology into teaching maintains a balanced link between the good teachers and good technology. In addition to having an awareness of the impact of technology on their teaching routines, teachers should be provided with the skills and knowledge necessary for operating and using technology. This is important for language learning classes where students can enhance their exposure to the authentic use of language and increase their access to various resources to practice and improve their learning.

However, the integration of CALL into EFL teaching can improve learning if employed with full support and understanding. Davies (2010, p. 261) defined CALL as "an approach to language teaching and learning in which computer technology is used as an aid to the presentation, reinforcement, and assessment of material to be learned, usually including a sustainable interactive element." CALL could also refer to learning software applications such as using E-mail and the Internet to help EFL language learners develop various skills. In particular, they can improve these learners' reading and writing skills, build their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and broaden their knowledge of the world (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Previous research (e.g., Alm, 2008; Tozcu, 2008; Yamauchi, 2009) also suggested that the integration of CALL (mainly the Internet-based technology such as blogs and wikis) motivates EFL language learners. Moreover, many scholars discussed different ways of implementation CALL in language learning programs (Ducate & Arnold, 2006; Levy & Stockwell, 2006). These various approaches mirror the ongoing growth and expansion of the CALL technology (Chylinski, 2005). However, while the use of technology can help learners expand their learning opportunities beyond the physical walls of the classroom, one of the challenges in EFL programs is concerned with keeping abreast of new technological advances. Some of these technological tools that could be used in EFL classes are explained in the following sections.

2.1 The Use of the Internet

The availability of multiple educational resources so freely has revolutionized the learning experiences of the new generation of students. Learners and teachers have virtual wings to go beyond the classroom walls and to access and share information all over the globe. In this era, teachers can navigate the instructional technology through varying applications. Searching and linking through different search engines can help teachers add more graphics and variety to their instruction delivery. EFL teachers can have additional benefits by joining online training programs and attending webinars available at different professional developmental sites. This has become much easier for EFL teachers to transform their teaching by exploring different teaching approaches. In addition, asynchronous (e.g., email) and synchronous (e.g., chatting) online media can provide a broader platform for these teachers to share their ideas and thoughts on enhancing learning (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik, 2014). This also offers teachers more opportunities to receive feedback from experts in their special fields. Such facilities can turn language teaching and learning into more appealing experiences for both teachers and students. More specifically, the use of email and chatting applications provides a common platform to EFL and native speakers of English to communicate in ways similar to those of the target language context.

2.2 The Importance of Multimedia

In addition to engaging them in invaluable learning opportunities, multimedia applications offer EFL students a chance to communicate, share, as well as enhance their access to the sources of information and knowledge. The application of multimedia in EFL teaching as a new tool is not confined to certain skills; rather it:

can be used as tool that is appropriate for all levels of education and it follows a mechanism for integrating a variety of media into the curriculum. This tool provides an interactive learning environment where students can learn and advance at their own pace (Perreault, 1995, p. 62).

By designing multimedia activities, teachers can encourage students to engage in collaborative tasks of pair and group work, which are the effective learning tasks for receiving feedback, solving learning problems, and building the knowledge of a particular discipline. Furthermore, students can design and share their learning materials with others and have access to the other language users and native speakers to improve their English (Horwitz, 2008; Kern, Ware & Warschauer, 2008).

2.3 The Skilled Use of Software and Hardware Technology

The selection of suitable software and hardware is equally important besides training and dealing with other technical issues in using technology in language learning programs. Depending upon the culture and the level of students, teachers should be able to perform a need analysis to see what software package(s) will be suitable for their students and match with the course goals. Due to the dramatic and rapid change in type and application of technology, EFL teachers should adapt themselves with the demands of the modern technology (Park & Son, 2009). This includes their awareness of the new and upgraded versions of the same technology they have used in their classes before. However, there should be training programs for teachers to help them keep abreast of the new educational technologies for language learning and teaching.

2.4 The Advanced Use of Author Ware

Due to the exceeding demand for advanced technology, the value of commercial software is decreasing. This puts pressure on teachers to become familiar with the authoring systems that help them design and tailor their programs to fit the real needs of their subject matter as well as the learning needs and demands of their students. The good news is that having such authoring programs in hand requires teachers only little knowledge in computers and no knowledge in programming. Put simply, teachers need only to be concerned with the content and the most effective ways to integrate their subject content into technology. Incorporation of hypermedia and hypertext and importing the objects into presentations or subject content are some of the helpful features of these authoring systems. As another example, teachers can insert objects such as clip art or movie clips created in other application programs to their presentations in order to add variety to their course delivery and to develop students' motivation in learning (Alm, 2008; Tozcu, 2008; Yamauchi, 2009).

2.2 Factors Affecting CALL Use and Integration in EFL Programs

According to Bandura (1986), there is a strong understanding that individuals' beliefs about certain issues are the best indicators of their decisions that they make during the course of everyday life. An EFL teacher's role inside the classroom as a facilitator or conventional teacher can be therefore determined by investigating their acceptance or resistance to the

implementation of CALL. Previous studies (e.g., Lam, 2000; Lee & Son, 2006; Suh, 2004) found that different variables such as teacher training, the existence of computer facilities, and the teachers' attitudes towards CALL affect their use of computer-mediated technology in their classes. Additionally, Al-Shammari (2007), who examined EFL learners' attitudes toward CALL at the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in Saudi Arabia, found that learners' attitudes were positive and female EFL learners had more positive attitudes towards CALL than their male counterparts.

However, as Graus (1999) stated, the availability of computers should not be considered the "be all and end all" of integrating CALL into language learning programs. That is to say, various factors such as the type of access to technology, attitudes towards change, the amount of time allocated, the suitability of software, the availability of technical support, the possibility of information sharing among users, and most of all, the quantity and quality of faculty training are decisive in utilizing this facility. In addition to these overt factors, there exist some beliefs (e.g., cultural, social, and religious) strongly held by the faculty and students regarding the use of CALL at English learning programs. For example, some teachers and students are concerned about the influence of Western culture on the local culture. As a result, some students and teachers seem to resist the integration of CALL even when its content is considered culturally revised and turned suitable.

Moreover, the integration of CALL at language learning classes is affected by institutional plans and policies. The CALL integration should be included in the mission of an educational institution. In this way, these institutions will assume the responsibility of procuring, installing, and training the use of the required hardware and software. The institutional policy should also include some technical support and network management without which the complete integration will not be materialized.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context

This training program was run for the ELI female faculty members at Women's main campus at KAU during the Fall Semester 2014–2015. This language institute is equipped with different CALL facilities such as computers and the Internet connection, and the faculty members are required to incorporate them into their teaching. However, these technological applications are only used for text processing or sharing PowerPoint presentations because of operating problems or lack of knowledge about CALL. A lack of training and tight-pacing routine are the other hindering factors affecting the faculty's effective use of technology in their classes. The teachers at ELI come from different parts of the globe, and their technology integration knowledge varies due to their training and teaching experiences.

3.2. Participants

A total of 30 advanced level (104) teachers participated in this training program. The teachers at the advanced level were selected because it was assumed that integrating CALL in such classes would be more effective than lower level classes. The endeavor was made to use CALL for teaching both productive and receptive skills of reading and writing, as well as other areas of language learning such as grammar and vocabulary. The training was scheduled for between 6 to 9 hours per week, which was half of the teachers' 18 hours of teaching load. The participants were chosen from five different nationalities (Saudi, Egyptian, Tunisian, American

and Pakistani), and they all held Master's degree in English (Literature, Linguistics, TESOL). The teachers had teaching experience of between 5 to 15 years.

3.3 The Proposed CALL Training Project

The proposed program was a one-semester long in-service CALL training designed for ELI faculty (Women's main campus). This multiple-phase program covered three classes (3 hours per class = total 9 hours) per week over a course of seven weeks. The entire project was divided into five stages: Alignment (Introductory), Preparation (Skills sorting), CALL Training, Implementation of CALL, and Evaluation stage. The program stages, subjects, and time blocks were designed based on the research recommendations and the CALL teaching experience of the researcher. The goal of the program was to introduce ELI faculty to CALL and to investigate the impact of CALL on their attitudes towards its integration in their classes. This project was initially launched as a pilot study only for 30 advanced level teachers. However, it will be later implemented for the training of the rest of the faculty members. The following requirements were of essential importance to the CALL training program:

Trainers: Qualified trainers who had knowledge in computer skills and applied linguistics. They had practical experience in using technologies in EFL instruction.

Computer labs: The labs were equipped with up-to-date computers, smart boards, a data show projector, two printers, and one scanner. Headphones or ceiling speakers were also added.

Adequate CALL software: CALL software that was evaluated compatible with hardware available in the computer lab. For the training program, CALL software should cover all language skills and range in complexity where they are not boring or overwhelming.

Internet connections: Local and global connections were of essential importance for the success of the CALL training program. Trainees needed to communicate with colleagues and other teachers via the Internet. In addition, Blackboard system was used.

Technical support: Professional technicians were readily available in the computer labs to maintain equipment and solve technical problems.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

Two data collection instruments, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, were utilized to collect the quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. The questionnaire was administered to all 30 EFL female 104 instructors who were given CALL integration training and were asked to implement it in their classes. This survey consisted of four positive and four negative statements to examine the participants' opinions and their attitudes towards the likely impact of CALL on their instruction and students' language learning. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the training program, and all teachers filled in and returned it. The descriptive analysis was conducted to find out about the teachers' perceptions on each statement.

As another data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview was employed to gather information about the teachers' opinions on CALL integration and to triangulate the findings from the questionnaire. This semi-structured interview included four core questions along with several follow-up questions to obtain more in-depth information on the factors affecting the teachers' use of CALL in their classes (see Appendix B). The researcher, who was one of the trainers, interviewed all teachers. Each interview lasted for 10-15 minutes and was

conducted in a friendly atmosphere. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed before they were content analyzed for detecting the recurring patterns and themes.

4. Results

The analysis of the teachers' opinions on the first question in Table 1 show that all 30 teachers strongly agreed that the integration of CALL can help to bring variety and quality to EFL teaching and learning at ELI. Also, the results from the second question indicated that 83.3% of the participants agreed that the integration of CALL into EFL programs could help students relate their learning to the real life situations. In response to the third question, 22 teachers (73.3%) agreed that the integration of CALL enables EFL teachers to address their students' needs with a clear understanding of their lessons. Additionally, 20 teachers (66.6%) endorsed the idea that the use of computers with CALL technology would bring about positive changes in the teachers' teaching styles and in addressing the students' response issues (question 4).

Table 1. Results of teachers' beliefs on positive statements of the questionnaire

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rank
1. Integration of CALL can help to bring a variety and quality to EFL teaching and learning at ELI.	0 0%	0 0%	30 100%	0 100%	1
2. Relating ICT to CALL in EFL teaching helps students to relate their learning with the real life.	0 0%	1 3.3%	25 83.3%	4 13.3%	2
3. Integration of CALL enables EFL teachers to address their students' needs with a clear understanding.	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	22 73.3%	6 20%	3
4. Use of computers with CALL technology will bring about a positive change in teachers' style of working and addressing the students' response issues.	1 3.3%	2 6.6%	20 66.6%	7 23.3%	4

Table 2. Results of teachers' beliefs on negative statements of the questionnaire

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rank
1. I don't feel comfortable with the use of computers in language teaching.	5 16.6%	25 83.3%	0 0%	0 0%	1
2. CALL technology is not better than any other teaching support system.	10 33.3%	18 60%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	2
3. Computers technology will replace teachers in future.	12 40%	17 56.6%	1 3.3%	0 0%	3
4. Use of CALL shifts the learning process to computer techniques learning instead of language learning.	10 33.3%	15 50%	4 13.3%	1 3.3%	4
5. Use of CALL exposes the students to culturally and linguistically unsuitable material.	8 26.6%	10 33.3%	5 16.6%	7 23.3%	5

5. Discussion

Given that the EFL instructors at ELI – KAU have limited experience in the use of CALL and its integration into EFL instruction, and that there should be special arrangements to help them attain more experience before integrating CALL as a part of their routine teaching methods, this training program was run and implemented to help them develop the basic computer skills or knowledge in the integration of CALL applications into their teaching. The findings of this project gave a clear indication of the impact of training on developing positive beliefs towards the use of CALL in EFL instruction. Majority of ELI 104 faculty members who were selected to participate in this study believed that the skilled use and integration of CALL could be an effective way of EFL teaching at ELI. This finding was consistent with previous research (e.g., Albilirini, 2006; Ebsworth et al., 2010; Kim, 2011; Oh, & French, 2007; Park & Son, 2009) on the instructors' positive beliefs towards the use of CALL after taking part in the training programs.

However, as suggested by scholars in different contexts (Bordbar, 2010; Kinnaman, 1995; Lam, 2000; Lee & Son, 2006; Park & Son, 2009; Suh, 2004), there were some factors affecting the faculty's use of CALL. The faculty members reported that the lack of appropriate

technical, financial, and training supports could affect the success or failure of these training programs. In addition, while the general attitude of the ELI faculty towards the importance of CALL was positive and all agreed that the conventional teaching approaches have fallen short of providing students in EFL contexts with appealing learning experiences, the current teaching practices at ELI women's main campus did not reflect those positive beliefs. This observation implies that teachers' positive beliefs are affected by some other factors that could be the topics for further research on the integration of CALL in this context.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study proved that training can help teachers develop positive attitudes towards the acceptance of CALL integration into their teaching. The successful outcome of this project suggests that EFL teachers can benefit from offering students technology-enhanced education to improve different areas of their language learning. The findings also suggest that instead of buying commercial programs to add technology to language teaching, authoring systems should be provided to language teachers to help them design and tailor their instructional materials to fit the subject matter at hand and to cater for the real learning needs of their students. Such authoring programs are usually user-friendly and require the faculty to have a basic knowledge of computers rather than mastering the skills of computer programming. Likewise, incorporating hypermedia and hypertext and importing the objects into presentations or subject content is another helpful feature of these authoring systems. In order to bring variety to their classrooms and motivate students (Alm, 2008; Tozcu, 2008; Yamauchi, 2009), EFL teachers can insert objects such as clip art or movie clips created in other application programs to their presentations.

In conclusion, with the growing interest and positive attitudes towards the use of technology in language learning classes, more training and future projects are needed to maximize the benefits of technology in EFL classes. Further studies are also needed to delve into the EFL teachers' actual classroom practices in order to find out about the challenges they face while blending or integrating technology in their instruction. However, students' perceptions of CALL or technology-enhanced learning should not be overlooked. Thus, addressing students' attitudes towards technology can lead to better decisions and adoptions while choosing the technological applications in language learning programs.

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Appendix A

Specific Timeline for Fall Semester, 1435-1436 (2014-2015)

Stages	Details	Targeted
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		Time	
Alignment phase	Alignment of the newly proposed specifications with the current guidelines from the CEA and NCAAA and proposing the outline for the preparation of the training program suitable to the current system.	Week 1 Module 1	
Preparation phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selection of materials and teaching resources according to the newly devised system. Sorting out the academic materials as per the target level of the students. - Needs analysis after the selection of trainees. - Selection of trainers and arrangements for the availability of all required equipment, software. 	Week 2 Module 1	
	Subject	Objectives	
Training Phase 1	Introduction to teaching and learning aids: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional aids. - New technologies. - Benefits of instructional technologies. 	Trainees will be able to identify the difference between traditional and new teaching aids and the arguments for using them in the language learning classrooms.	Week 3 Module 1
Training Phase 2	Computer components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Input devices - Processing - Output devices - Operating systems and computer applications 	Participant will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify key computer components and its devices. - Open and close different type of computer applications. 	Week 4 Module 1
Training Phase 3	Training for required computer skills before learning the CALL skills.	Participants will be able to master key computing skills necessary for CALL use.	Week 5 Module 1
Training Phase 4	Strategies of using search engines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asynchronous - Synchronous - Communication medium 	Participant will be given a cognitive perspective of Internet use in EFL instruction.	Week 6 Module 1
Training Phase 5	Introduction to CALL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is CALL? - History of CALL - Visiting some selected English learning websites. - Discussion lists on teaching EFL - CALL software - Using CALL for EFL teaching. 	Participant will be given a cognitive perspective of CALL use in EFL instruction.	Week 7 Module 1
Implementation Phase	Implementing the CALL in advanced level (104) classes Using CALL for productive and receptive skills of reading and writing as well as for other language learning areas such as grammar and vocabulary for Module 4, 6 or 9 hours per week out of total 18 instructional hours.		Week 1-4 Module 2

Analytical Phase	Analysis of the collected data from the experimental 104 sections; comparison of specification and evaluation of the findings.	Week 5–6 Module 2
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Appendix B

Semi-structured interview protocol

1. What is your opinion on the integration of CALL in language learning programs?
2. How do you evaluate the implementation of this training program at this institute? What would be the impact of this training on your teaching in the future?
3. Would you recommend the integration of CALL to your colleagues?
4. What do you think about the challenges of integrating CALL at this institute?