Using CALL in Teaching Writing: An Explicatory Study on its Efficacy for ESL/EFL Learners

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Abstract
The current study aims to analyse and substantiate the impact of use and importance of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to students writing in English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL). It is an explicatory study based on the main findings of researchers in the field and the practical involvement and observation of the researcher as an ESL/EFL teacher in writing classrooms. The scientific literature on the subject as well as the analytical work done on it have been critically examined for efficacy and proof. The study also investigates the usefulness of the various CALL-based materials and tools employed in the teaching process, and it examines how far they can help students in their classroom practices. The major outcomes of the study demonstrated that most teachers and students have found that CALL has helped them in a positive way, has motivated them to learn ESL/EFL writing, and has improved their knowledge and capability in writing English effortlessly. It has also been discovered that this method of teaching writing enriches their information and plays an important role in developing their academic skills. The current study, therefore, recommends that students should use computers in learning English writing, in particular, in order to increase the level of learning.

Keywords: English language teachers/learners, computer assisted language learning, CALL, ESL/EFL English writing, technology integration

1. Introduction

With the advancement of technology and its common practice in almost every household in the middle-income group and above, no aspect of modern civilization is left out without it. Its importance, efficacy, necessity is realized in every walk of life, especially with the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the context of language teaching, the last twenty years have seen great changes revolutionizing the concept of language teaching. There has been an amazing interest in conducting research studies on the impact and usefulness of information and communication technologies in the teaching and learning of ESL/EFL. It has been observed by the TESOL Professor, Writer and Consultant, Ken Beatty (2013), author/co-author of more than 130 ESL textbooks used worldwide from the primary to tertiary levels, that computers increasingly play an important role in education particularly language learning. Furthermore, Wang (2011) has conducted various studies on the competence and efficacy of computer technology and the software programs on teaching of writing. He has found that about 80% of language learners agreed that the incorporation of CALL into language learning has encouraged them and boosted their interest in learning English writing. Researchers have also found out that the Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS), a computer system offering instant and tailored instruction to language learners usually without intervention from a human teacher, has been successful in enabling learners of English writing to adopt a precise writing approach, involving them in a well-organized practice with specific strategies. ITSs have the common goal of enabling learning in a meaningful and effective manner by using a variety of computing technologies (Allen et al., 2014). More precisely, CALL is constantly making the act of writing less stressful and time consuming. CALL also helps the language instructor and learner, if it is cautiously designed as part of lesson plan, empower a natural and improved understanding for language learners (Beatty, 2013).

researchers nowadays are very thoroughly investigating the usefulness of computer assisted English language teaching and learning in accordance with the traditional as well as modern approaches. These previous and existing researches have positive consequence for the CALL course developers to help them make effectual software programs and to design programs for valuable use of computers in the academic setting. Alongside the existing research on the efficacy of CALL, the issues that have been uppermost in the mind of researchers are whether computer usage aids in the improvement of basic language skills, the language content and areas where computer is most helpful, the desired levels of students who can most benefit from the computer assisted language learning program, the name and nature of the computer program that is most suitable for language learning, and the attitudes of language learners towards CALL. In an endeavour to respond to some of these issues, Neu and Scarcella (1991) have observed that the introduction of the computer-assisted learning software particularly the word processing program, has helped in improving the writing quality of learners. Language learners have shown to achieve better grades in word-processed assignments. Psychological factors such as motivation and willingness to write assignments can be also enhanced while using word processing (Neu & Scarcella, 1991).

The current study is intended to show, evaluate, and suggest the importance and exigency of the employment of CALL for the purposes of teaching and learning writing in ESL/EFL. The researcher also stresses upon the fact that since writing is a complex language skill, it needs a higher level of communication skill and brainstorming so that there is an increasing need to employ

effective communicative programs to teach such a skill. CALL, therefore, can be incorporated in the instruction program for language writing in order to help language learners acquire suitable writing skills. This study reinforces, with logic and reasoning, the utility of such a technological tool as a powerful extension of the computer's role in ESL/EFL writing process. It is discussed and examined in the following pages that success can be attained through the implementation of an interesting writing environment which provides resources and tools leading to the writer's improvement. It has been the motive of the researcher to discuss and claim that CALL has a lot of affirmative and encouraging features that counterweigh the negative aspects of technology by way of integrating technology into language learning classrooms. It is not to outplay teachers or to ignore their longstanding importance and necessity as the ultimate source of motivation. In a language classroom, they act as facilitators to provide a better understanding of a particular topic, and adjusting learner's speed, tempo, and attitude according to their individual needs. It has been argued, asserted, and substantiated in the current study that computers allow ESL writers to make change in their drafts, with the aid of various software programs, spell checkers, and grammar tools. These tools allow them to modify their draft, giving them ease and more time to focus on the content. To facilitate their work, word processors help students to present information in a range of ways and use a spell checker or thesaurus.

2. Literature Review

Discussing on the specifics and the distinctiveness of teaching writing to ESL students, Tangermpoon (2008) observes that writing does not only mean generating and systematizing ideas but also translating them into legible texts. A good lexical knowledge and mastery in principles of structural organization are prerequisites for good writing. Tangermpoon further points out that writing is not a painless work to do and is most likely to give rise to many problems for learners of ESL. He emphasizes that the mastery over computer skills can be effective in overcoming those problems. Computer, with its various programs and systems, offered for learning of writing can greatly enhance, stimulate, and develop the learning process, and help learners achieve language outcomes in terms of writing skills. With the onset of advanced information technology, the introduction of word processor as a tool for learning to write good texts has gone a long way to improving writing skills. Pennington (2004) believes that the word processor can help a great deal in composing and revising a text, in addition to proofreading it for spellings and sentence constructions. Many researchers have stressed upon the feasibility and usefulness of word processing in learning writing. It is the most acknowledged and universally used computer application in second language acquisition today (Pennington, 2004). Duber (2000) also asserts that the word processor makes available useful training for guided and free writing. It offers vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spellings, which have an obvious relevance to the sub-skills that are needed for writing.

Hubbard et al. (2013) states that the teaching of writing was transformed and reorganized for everyone with word-processing, and the addition of spell checkers has been quite useful. There are many ways in which computers enhance writing instruction. Also, it has become easier to do writing assignments today with tools such as an online word processor which available for free. Fidaoui et al. (2010) have shown in their work that using a computer in ESL/EFL classes has a positive impact on students' attitudes. Their study presents the recommendation of the language teachers who have confirmed in the questionnaires given to them that the use of computer

technology helped students to develop and improve their writing skills. Students were quizzed by the researchers and they too agreed that the incorporation of CALL enhanced their motivation in learning English skills. Bozdogan (2012) concurs that the introduction of computer technology into the language learning environment transforms the students from passive into active participants. Bozdogan believes that when Information technology is integrated into the learning and teaching environment, it offers new and interesting opportunities and presents a challenge before the teachers and the learners to utilize them for their language needs. Technology allows and encourages language teachers to select from multiple options, as teaching aids, like video clips, graphs, advertisement, and online essay maps which help ESL/EFL learners form and organize ideas, working as writing prompts, to write their compositions in a logical manner (Williams, 2005). These technological aids facilitate brainstorming, involving the whole class, helping learners with prompt corrective feedback with regard to spelling and grammar.

Microsoft (MS) Word in particular is such tool which is very useful to the English language learners in helping them do formatting and editing of the written texts. This makes them revise their writing easily and quickly. Word-processing programs allows a wide range of formatting possibilities and make editing and revising much easier (Jafarian, et al., 2012). This gives the learners the freedom to learn from their own mistakes, without any let or hindrance. It also helps them effectively and urgently when the teacher is not readily available for correcting the assignment. A very important tool in the learning and teaching of English writing is the e-mail communication. It has been termed as "the mother of all Internet applications" (Warschauer, et al., 2000, p. 3). It has been variously perceiving that writing an email message gives the feeling as if we are communicating by word of mouth than just writing. It is a veritable piece of written communication. It has also been felt that though it is akin the speech communication, it nevertheless is a very potent tool for learning the writing process with the correction tools on its window. Emails written offline perform like a writing assignment with regard to its linguistic characteristics. When offline, there is ample time for editing, word processing, and composing as a well-written text to be imported as an attachment (Danet, 2001).

Computer technology has to be integrated into the learning and teaching process, as part of a challenging mission in developing a successful educational system. CALL devices are convenient facilities that generate the most successful interactive learning environments for activities that develop all language learning skills (Dina, & Ciornei, 2013). To obtain complete advantage from the possibilities of the computer for language learning, language teachers have to stimulate the learners to build up a consistent rapport with computers. The technology that computers offer has to be assimilated with instructional programs that ensure a genuine advancement of the teaching practices and procedures (AbuSeileek& Abu Sa'aleek 2012). Modern times have experienced far-reaching transformation in the scope and manner of English language learning, specifically the learning of English writing, where software technology and online language learning resources have acquired an inescapable position in order to help language learners face the challenges of learning to write. The application of CALL programs in language learning denotes a pedagogical shift from a traditional teacher-centred approach to a method that is more multipurpose, handy, and student-centred. (Gonzalez-Lloret, 2003).

Through computer assisted communication, an extensive array of communication means is available for English language learners, without the need of using any specific methodology. English language teachers have largely found it necessary to teach language in real time, to transform the learning experience contingent to the practical experience, to contextualize it. CALL technology helps in a big way in making English writing more effective and conforming to the social setting. It makes writing more communicative and real as against imaginary and vague (Cunningham, 2000). Furthermore, the students' writing performance is further improved when the grammar, punctuation, and spelling are readily checked by a computer, compared to the students whose hand-written assignments were checked by the teacher.

Computer Assisted Language Learning is regarded as a language teaching methodology in which the computer is employed as a support in creating, redrafting, and appraising a written text for the purpose of learning effective writing. What enhances its importance is the nature and scope of the interactive element in it. In this approach language learners are left free to learn through the process of trial and error and to choose how to rewrite the exercises based on their own progress. Grammar practice, communication activities and vocabulary improvement can be attained with felicity and interest (Madhavi, 2014).

McGarrel (1998) believes that computer works in various roles in English language writing. It assumes the role of an instructor, motivator, mainstay, source of information, and initiator of communication. He further elaborates that the computer and its accessories aid a great deal in the development of non-native writing skills. She expresses that the computer offers a situational and practical potential required for the successful development of such skills. Phinney (1996) discusses the importance of computer assisted compositions, and its utility and efficacy for new writers and as a writing aid in the writing workshops. She construes that depending on the language proficiency and writing experience of the ESL students, certain aspects of software are crucial for solving the writing problems.

4. Discussion

CALL carries very interesting and specific software that work as effective language teaching tools. These software programs relate to the application of thesaurus, grammar check, vocabulary, spelling check, pronunciation, and several writing programs, like process writing, writing of emails…etc. These learning programs offer both the teachers and the learners various exercises to help them improve language and all its skills. The literature review in the pages above has made it clear that there have been a number of researches and studies carried out by language scholars and experienced teachers of ESL discussing on the importance of computers in language teaching and learning. This section emphasises on CALL as an opportunity for students to develop their writing skills. The learning of writing is a continuous process and is beneficial almost in every vocation. It is a constant activity in which learners discover their abilities at every step. It is channel through which writers express their thoughts or ideas. It is also closely related to the communication skills. Engineers, doctors, lawyers, officials, businessmen, and people in every walk of life have to write either in the form of reports, memos, prescriptions, notes, emails, letters, and notices. If these written messages and statements are not written in a way in which they can clearly and directly communicate to the people to whom they are written, then the entire purpose of language learning comes to naught, resulting in some serious communication gaps, or misunderstandings. In the

academia also, it helps students to interact with their teachers and translate their thoughts into words. Incorrect grammar structures, spelling mistakes, wrong usage of words, and a faulty and disorganized composition can result in serious flaw in understanding and inability to express. Hyland (2003, p.3) says, "writing is seen as a product constructed from the writer's command of grammatical and lexical knowledge, and writing development is considered to be the result of imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher". So, it is important that the ESL/EFL learner has to practice, repeat, and revise a lot before making his or her writing an end product. The thrust in learning writing is whetting it through different stages of its composition.

Any written composition has to pass through five stages in order to become a complete and accurate written product. These stages are brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation. The important thing to note here is that quite often language learners do not follow these stages in a linear progression. They overlap and often follow a looping movement. This, inevitably takes a lot of time in writing a finished product, and often lacks the clarity of communication. The result is that this kind of writing become non-communicative, or carries a flaw which results often in wrong communication (Reid, 2001, p, 29). Goldberg et al (2003) conducted several studies on teaching writing through the traditional method and then through the computers. Goldberg et al, (2003) discovered that when students produced writing on computers the process of generating and reviewing the text was more integrated.

> Students would begin recording ideas and would modify their ideas before completing an entire draft. Students also appeared more willing to abandon ideas in mid-stream to pursue a new idea. In this way, the process of revision tended to begin earlier in the writing process and often was performed as new ideas were being recorded. (p. 6)

Thus, rather than waiting until an entire draft of text was produced before beginning the revision process, students appeared to critically examine and edit their text as ideas flowed from their mind to written form (Goldberg et al, 2003). Becker et al (1999) led a survey among teachers of English language writing to see the aim and attitudes of second language learners in using computers for learning writing. Becker et al discovered that 44% of the teachers strongly agreed that computers facilitated the learners' writing abilities. The survey has also showed that by using computers learners are able to write more freely, and for longer periods, and longer texts. Various activities on the computer software language program, like double-clicking a word, cutting it, and then pasting it in the correct place, editing the texts for errors, and revising it help learners to become capable writers with ease.

It is then a foregone reality, as established by various researches noted, quoted, and analysed in the pages above, that in the second language classroom today the teacher is not the only trainer. He has no option but to include the CALL approach with his teaching if he wants his students to be effective language learners. A teacher has to lead learners to the computer, advising him or her as what to choose and how to choose from there, providing him all necessary language feedbacks. Both with the learners have become the inevitable triumvirate in the language learning process. Hence, computers have become precious and important devices for language learning, and the Internet can show a constructive prospective for learning to write and read (Ghasemi, et al., 2011). This growing tool ought to be regarded as incorporated into the learning and teaching

process, as part of a daring project in building a successful educational system. CALL programs in second language writing curriculum have been established as extremely successful and useful (Cunningham, 2000). The various outcomes of the studies conducted on the topic have revealed that language learners who used CALL programs achieved better results than their counterparts who learnt from the traditional language teaching approaches. De Szendeffy (2005) believes that CALL programmes have the potential to allow each learner to learn freely and independently from his or her own place, be it a home or a library. For the purpose of teaching second language writing, there are a number of activities that the CALL software programs offer to language learners, teaching them how to improvise, manipulate and edit a text.

5. Limitations and Conclusion
We have discussed in detail the benefits of using CALL for second language writing. Despite these far reaching positive aspects of CALL language learning programs, there are also some limitations. A computer cannot provide individualized feedback. It cannot also have the kind of engagement and individual rapport that a language teacher builds with his students in the classroom. Computers cannot grasp the meaning in text and therefore are helpless in evaluating the rhetorical elements that modem composition studies feel to be the most important in producing effective writing: audience, purpose, tone, and context (Kemp, 1999). Further, in surroundings where there is limited access to media, computers and other technology, learners and teachers are not expected to connect with information technology. There is also a possibility that the learner's concentration is jeopardized by a plethora of technical minutiae dissuading them to completely focus on the language learning assignment.

CALL software programs in teaching English writing to second language learners are becoming popular and are widely used today all around the globe. In fact, they have now become a measure of the accreditation for language institutes and colleges. The aim of this the current paper was to explore, analyse and substantiate the importance of CALL for both the teachers and the learners. Furthermore, the paper entailed to discover the employment of computer technologies in ESL writing classes, and the benefits of learning through them. The research paper also endeavoured to consider and examine the sameness and disparities the both instructors and language learners observe in the use of computers in English language writing classrooms. The various high value researches conducted by the specialists of language teaching and CALL showed that the commonality of second language learners and instructors preferred the incorporation of CALL in ESL writing classes.

The sphere of computer assisted language learning is extremely diverse. To facilitate and expand the probabilities of utilizing CALL efficiently and successfully, there must be a lot of brainstorming and thinking on the way CALL needs to be incorporated into the language learning curricula. The learning atmosphere, the attitudes of the learners, the level of teachers and language learners, the facilities in the classrooms, the culture of learning in a particular situation, all are to be studied, examined and weighed well before using CALL as a tool for teaching English writing to language learners at any level. The learning environment comprises the expansive, open set of courses flexibility in choice of tools and materials. The employment of computers in language education consistently guides to a larger scale activities and initiatives from the learners. The pre-

arranged, content dominated, teacher centred approaches to curriculum and language teaching procedures are not likely to be advantageous and encouraging to successful utilization of CALL.

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