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AN EVALUATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPUTER- ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL) IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) CLASSROOM

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Abstract: Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been used to aid second language and foreign language learning. The various uses of CALL have empowered students to be individually active and creative in learning and are considered effective to improve students' achievement (Chambers & Spreche, 1980), although it is not free of challenges and problems during its implementation. As a product combination of technology and pedagogy, it is therefore essential to evaluate these two essential aspects involved in the design of CALL software. This paper describes several aspects in evaluating the implementation of CALL software for second language classroom from the aspects of technological features (hardware, software, and technical problems) and pedagogical factors (design, materials, teacher's role) involved within CALL programs.

INTRODUCTION

The use of technology in education nowadays has becoming prominent to support both teaching and learning processes. One example for this is the worldwide use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in second language classroom. Many language institutions have now implemented CALL to support second language learning environment, providing more exposure to the target language input and second language learning experience for language learners. As a result, students are expected to be more familiar in utilizing computer technology, proactive finding information, and creative dealing with the application of materials to support their learning.

Since the first operation of CALL in 1960 in the University of Illinois through PLATO project (Levy 1997), CALL program has evolved over the time which now provides more choices of programs such as communication

feature, multimedia learning and the latest use of computer technology, the internet (Warschauer 1996). For communication, evidence shows that in a number of Australian and American schools, web pages and electronic mail (e-mail) are commonly used to send school news and submit students' homework (Wheeler 2001). In addition, with the availability of internet connection, the World Wide Web (WWW) has provided access for learners to explore information from either internal and external databases available. This helps learners explore more information in shorter time. Also, this easy access allows them to develop their thinking skills as it provides greater flexibility to users to integrate with other learners virtually through the touch of a finger. Lee (2000) maintains that network-based teaching is now given significant contribution to the use of integrated CALL among students. There is also chance for EFL students to interact virtually with native speakers via internet (Lee 2000). In this way, students are no longer being trapped and inhibited with classroom activities where interactions only happen around teachers and peers. In more arranged situation, the use of Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) for distance learning in the British Open University for instance, is another evidence for the successful application of CALL (Chambers & Sprecher 1983). Thus, the various uses of CALL have „empowered students“ to be individually active and creative in learning and are considered effective to improve students' achievement (Chambers & Sprecher 1980).

Considering many possibilities that CALL may provide to the development of second language teaching and learning nowadays, can it be argued that the use of CALL for English Language classroom has been successfully implemented?

Many schools and institution have implemented CALL environment EFL classroom due to the fact that the implementation of CALL has familiarized language learners in utilizing computer technology, proactive finding information, and creative dealing with the application of materials. In most CALL environment classes, computers are utilized with online and offline programmes to facilitate English language teaching and learning. The University of Mataram, one of the users of CALL technology, has been consistently implementing several CALL programs for the past decade to help EFL learners at particular university level in learning English as a second language. Several types of CALL programs, from electronic dictionaries, multimedia based learning programmes, to offline and online based CALL programs have been adapted to facilitate English language learning. CALL are adapted in most skill subjects offered in English Department, such as Intensive Language Course, General Speaking, Listening, Reading, Paragraph Writing, as well as in some content courses such as Teaching Media, English Grammar, and English Vocabulary. During the implementation period, rarely were CALL programs being evaluated to assess their eligibility. In fact, technical and non-technical problems often occur during the implementation of CALL in second language classroom. According to some researchers, the application of this technology has changed teachers and students roles in classroom (Lam &

Lawrence 2002, Lee 2000) and as a new teaching tool it has unfortunately engendered some constraints for the teachers (Lee 2000). Based on these premises, an evaluation on CALL program has become a salient one. As CALL program is a product combination of technology and pedagogy, it is therefore essential to evaluate these two essential aspects involved in the development of CALL program.

This paper tries to evaluate the implementation of CALL programs for second language learning environment from several aspects of technology (hardware, software, and technical problems) and pedagogy (design, materials, teacher's role) involved within the design of CALL programs. This assessment is conducted by analysing several literatures from research findings and theoretical articles (Brain 1999, Hubbard 1996, Lam & Lawrence 2002, Lee 2000) focused on the utilization of computer based language learning programmes. It is expected to provide adequate information for the development of useful CALL programme's evaluation form.

TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CALL

The technological aspects of CALL program is mainly related to the information of the program hardware and software. Evaluating these two aspects can be started by considering some of the basic information about a CALL program (products or sites). This information adequately covers the topic for the intended audience, includes the name of a product, date of publicity, name of publisher, contact detail, product type, speed, language used, and off course the cost. They are likely to be the main aspects to be known prior to purchasing or when starting to do further assessment.

This information seems to be less important Especially when it comes to price, there is an inconvenient fact that CALL technology has high cost to utilise regarding the cost of hardware, software and maintenance. Lee (2000) firmly argues that hardware and software as well as IT staffs are some of the financial obstacles of using this advent technology. Educational institutions in this case need to choose the most affordable price that suits their school budget. Besides, as technology changes rapidly, selecting the most appropriate hardware and software to use among many specifications is a bit difficult. As a result of the improper choice of technology, both teacher and students may negatively be affected (Office of Technical Assessment 1995, cited in Lee 2000).

The availability of hardware and software as the most significant aspects of computer is another problem in selecting this technology (Herschbach 1994, Miller 1997, Office of Technology Assessment 1995, Norburg&Lundblaud 1997, cited in Lee 2000). Sometimes CALL programs can be used for all types of operating system and do not require special hardware specification, such as big RAM (Random Access Memory) and large hard disc space. Conversely, programs containing a lot of graphics and multimedia files may need bigger capacity of RAM to support the speed regarding to the use of graphics as well as video and audio files. Furthermore, certain types of CALL programs may only be able to run

under Windows operating system and may not be compatible for other operating system such as, McIntosh or vice versa.

Another prominent aspect in software requirement is the availability of internet access, because some programs in the form of website need access to internet and other programs may need either just CD-ROM¹ or both CD-ROM and internet access or are just stand alone. Supplementary software related to the presence of other software to run the programs is sometimes needed. For examples are the uses of video player and audio player. So, considering variety of software available in the market, institutions are required to choose wisely the program primarily based on the technical support they have.

Moving on to design, it worths to look specifically at software's interface (program's appearance to the user) and navigation components. Screen layout evaluation focuses on the presentation of output features such as text, pictures, graphics and other multimedia features (background sound and video), as well as their suitability with pedagogical purpose. Bradin (1999) suggests that software format should be consistent to stimulate and help users focus on the tasks instead of making them bored or distracted by the screen display. Besides, the use of pictures and sounds need to be in line with the pedagogical goals in terms of accuracy and authenticity. A good software should adapt aspects of meaningful input, authenticity of the material, and accuracy to the target language. These purposes can also be applied through the availability of feedback to correct students' errors, or even to add additional information of certain knowledge. Sometimes, the programs do not provide feedback when the students produced mistakes, or the quality of feedback do not represent meaningful input. This kind of CALL program of course may lead misunderstanding to learners, and therefore is less recommended to support language learning.

One more technical problem worths mentioning here relates to the use of navigation buttons and icons in CALL program. Navigation buttons or icons installed need to be simple and easy to provide more flexibility and accessibility for the users whilst exploring throughout the program. Accessibility also means allowing users to do more exploration in the middle of a task such as printing, hiding graphics, saving uncompleted task, or even playing with the sound and video. For language learners in particular, easy access to electronic dictionary in the middle of a task may provide more meaningful and effective learning situation for learners. Flexibility as such will provide better assistance in facilitating language learners, and as a result will create a more meaningful learning condition for learners.

PEDAGOGICAL ASPECT OF CALL

Besides assessing the technical aspects of CALL program, it is imperative to formulate a number of reasonable questions which highlight the most relevant concern to a set of approach-based evaluation criteria

¹ A compact used as a read-only optical memory device for a computer system.

(pedagogical features). Based on Hubbard's (1996) framework of CALL program design, two main criteria of language teaching approach and computer delivery system need to be evaluated under the implementation of CALL. Language teaching approach underpins linguistics and learning assumption to find the relevancy between software and approach (teacher fit). Linguistics assumption relates to the evaluation of materials in relevancy with the stated objectives, syllabus and method (Hubbard 1996). Language materials can be arranged in certain type of syllabus. Structural to task-based syllabus can be used to present the materials. Syllabus is recognized from the method used, the way language is introduced and used in presentation, practice, production and learning activities.

In order to formulate these pedagogical aspects, it is imperative to know the target users, in this case the target students, the goals of the target students, and the setting for the implemented software. It is known that target learners may vary depend on age, cultural background, reasons for learning a language, as well as their learning style. Different age of learners may have to receive different types of treatment, as no such a treatment can be applied to all ages of learners.

The assessment towards CALL program should also scale the accuracy of cultural aspect based on the belief that language and culture is inseparable. These factors need to be assessed beforehand in order to determine the right software. In short, in order the program to fit the students' pedagogical needs, it needs to have a curriculum built into it.

THE ROLES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN CALL CLASSROOM

Another aspect that needs to be looked at in the running of CALL environment classroom, is the roles of teachers and students. Some researchers argue that the application of CALL in English language classroom has made some changes to the roles of teachers and students. They assert that teacher's role is not only as an expert of the subject matter and a decision maker but also as a facilitator, resource person and advisor, whilst students have more freedom to manage their learning in finding data and meaning (Gremo & Abe 1985, Johnson et al. 1998, Lee & VanPatten 1995, Smith & Kolosick 1996, cited in Lam & Lawrence 2002). This mirrors a metamorphosis of students' education from passive learners to more active learning participants. Students participate more in class by working a lot with computer and having a discussion with their classmates or peers, whereas teacher has less control but still responsible in maintaining the learning situation.

However, in what level teachers should release their control to let learners manage their learning is another challenge for teachers (Wheeler 2001) in CALL situation. In fact, even though computer provides better language practice, teacher's role is still irreplaceable. There are some tasks that cannot be carried out with the assistance of solely computer. In a study conducted by Lam & Lawrence (2002) for instance, CALL situated students are more likely to rely on their teacher as a source of information when they

had to finish a task in limited time. This act is also motivated by the students' unfamiliarity with the applied program. In this case, students depend a lot more on the classroom teacher, before they can finally adjust with technological barrier. For effective implementation of CALL, teacher's role in CALL classroom needs to adapt with the students needs. In this sense, teacher's flexibility to change function from merely a source person to a person with more facilitative function is a challenge for language instructor.

Despite the changing of teacher's role in CALL situated classroom, it is also worth considering that this technology is new for many teachers. As technology changes rapidly, many teachers inevitably had to acquire new skills in CALL environment and to struggle implementing it effectively. In fact, many teachers still find it difficult to apply CALL because of their knowledge limitedness about the program. As Wheeler claims

“...how teachers should adapt current teaching skills to accommodate the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is only just the beginning. In the meantime, teachers now have to grapple with how to apply new technologies effectively to teaching learning.” (Wheeler 2001: 9).

This shows a clear imbalance between the development of CALL technology and the capability of tutors who are mostly responsible for the application phase in classroom. Due to this problem, more trainings to familiarize teachers to CALL program and how to run it in the classroom setting are some of the future actions needed to overcome the challenge.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, despite the various benefits that CALL offers to English Language classroom, unfortunately several instructional components are not progressing at an equal pace. The development of CALL technology must be followed by the empowerment of tutors and students as well as the development of some instructional components. There is a necessity to change some of the curriculum components such as, curriculum evaluation, record keeping, communication, teaching methodology, and students' evaluation (Wheeler 2001). As the role changing, it is a challenge for teachers to manage the CALL classroom setting without losing their power of control. Problem with over-budgeting is also crucial. Chambers & Sprecher (1983) suggest that the utilization of computer in Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) in general or CALL in particular may adequately provide technology with lower cost.

Considering that the evaluation of CALL programs is a challenging task, several important actions are needed to be figured out for the development of this technology in the future. The result of Software evaluation can reveal the real quality of language software available nowadays and hopefully will provide more valuable inputs to develop the future application of CALL technology in foreign language classroom.

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