

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) As a Method to Develop Study Skills in Students of Engineering and Technology at the Tertiary Level

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INTRODUCTION

Computers have emerged as fascinating technological tools in the educational arena. Their use in classrooms as a tool for teaching holds a great significance for language learning using computers in language learning can go a long way in developing study skills in learners of engineering and technology at the tertiary level.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDY SKILLS

Every learner is an individual with different needs and abilities of learning a language. Traditional methods of teaching a language placed the teacher in the role of a transmitter of knowledge while learners were seen as passive recipients of this knowledge. With the advent of the communicative method of language teaching, the focus in the classroom shifted from the teacher to the learner. Current trends in the field of English Language Teaching focus on learner autonomy, learner involvement, learner-generated syllabi, creation of relaxed atmosphere for learning, and training to relate to need-based learning. As a result, the concept of individualized instruction is increasingly gaining importance.

STUDY SKILLS IN ENGLISH.

In a sense, Study Skills are doing with getting information from any subject from the relevant sources of knowledge. The main sources of information for a learner are: a) books, b) classroom lectures, and c) the world at large. Learners have to internalise the information provided by these sources in the most efficient way in order to retain and retrieve it when necessary.

As for as school learners are concerned, when it comes to collecting information from different sources, they mostly depend on reading the textbooks and listening to teachers explaining the contexts of the textbook. In identifying the source of knowledge and understanding the ways by which the source of information, school learners mostly depend on reading the textbooks and listening to teachers explaining the contents of the textbooks. When they move from school to college their horizon of knowledge is expected to expand. They are expected to take down notes while they listen to lectures in the classroom. They are also expected to seek information from various other sources and read more than one book for any given subject and assimilate the information presented in them. This requires efficient ways of reading. They need to organize this information and present it in their assignments, examinations and projects.

But when it comes to training in learners receive study skills in colleges at tertiary level, it is rather inadequate instead they are made to receive dense

information in a short time. Due to their inability to assimilate the input they receive in various subjects, a sense of insecurity grips their minds.

The sense of insecurity thus gives rise to diffidence and makes them take recourse to 'memorization' without proper comprehension. Such cramming makes the knowledge received short lived and haphazard. What is required is not learning long texts by rote, but developing an ability to take down notes in the classroom. For, certainly the lectures given in classes contain more details than what is given as 'handouts'. Though reading, summarizing, writing paragraphs, information transfer skills are included in the syllabus in the first two semesters at the first year level in colleges, these skills remain confined to the English classes alone and are not extended to the learning of core subjects.

In this cyber age where, most of the academic activities are computer directed the study skills particularly those related to receptive skills can be effectively developed using Computer Assisted Language Learning method.

While talking about the computers and second language skills development says that out of the four skills of language learning, the receptive skills mainly, listening and reading can be commonly addressed by CALL programmes. Hence, Study skills that fall in the category of receptive skills can also be developed using the CALL method.

While using CALL materials in a language classroom, the computer envisages an important role for the teacher. Though, the teachers do not control the learning process they by integrating technology in their teaching provide an excellent backup or support because, they can monitor the linguistic performance and progress without directly interfering during the learning process.

Teachers can also modify and adopt any CALL learning materials to suite the learners needs and levels of competence. While using the CALL materials the learners have the autonomy to identify and adopt the kind of strategy that would best suit their learning style, choosing such a strategy would also facilitate the learning process. Studies show that CALL materials motivate the students for a better learning and provide them a stress free environment.

STUDY SKILLS - AN INSIGHT

The term "Study Skills" a general term, which encompasses a wide variety of traits, is associated with personal growth and development ranging from attitudes to behaviours.

Study Skills are skills acquired for the purpose of self-development or for a good career. On the academic front, new learning styles, networking with other students, acquiring communication skills, ability to listen to lectures with concentration, reading a book and taking notes, participating in classroom activities are some of the study skills.

The focus of teaching these skills centers around the individual academic or personal growth. The basis for success in academics is hard work,

disciplined studying and acquiring the ability to critically assess. As time is very precious, time management can also be considered as a Study Skill.

Study Skills also include reading academic texts efficiently and effectively; taking notes from lectures and books; doing basic research; using library or computer-based resources; writing academic papers; taking part in discussions; presenting papers; managing study time and preparing for examinations

Encouraging students to be creative and appreciating innovation in students motivate students to excel at what they are doing. Teaching them to plan projects inculcates a sense of responsibility and helping them to manage these projects infuses a sense of accountability. By giving focus to these different types of study skills the communication skills of learners can also be developed by using CALL.

NOTE TAKING

Note taking is another Study Skill, which has to be necessarily developed in students. There are usually three main occasions, as Michael J. Wallace says when notes are taken while listening.

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According to Michael J. Wallace (1998) they are:

- a. to take down notes while listening.
- b. to take down notes while reading.
- c. to write notes from memory.

Similarly there three main reasons as to why note are taken down:

1. to have a record of the speaker's own or writer's main ideas.
2. to help one's memory when revising, e.g. before an examination
3. to make what the speaker or writer says a part of your own knowledge.

In order to inculcate this skill of note taking students can be trained to use CALL as a technique of language learning. When it comes to taking down notes while listening, a worksheet can be given and students can be asked to listen to an audio text either from a CALL material or from an audio-text. The worksheet can have a gap-filling task wherein the students while listening to the text can fill up the gaps by using relevant information from the listened text. The worksheet can be programmed in the CALL text. So that, the evaluation will be instantaneous.

REFERENCE SKILLS - SEARCHING AN ONLINE CATALOGUE

Reference skill is another important study skill, which must be inculcated in students. Here, CALL has a major role to play because; even though manual cataloguing is still available people prefer online catalogues.

An online catalogue is a list of the materials available in the library, and this list can be accessed through the computer. Most libraries have an online catalogue of holdings (e.g. books, journals, electronic publications and audio-visual materials) available with them. So, it becomes the duty of the English

teacher to make the learners get familiar with the method of using online cataloguing.

COMPUTERS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Computers and language learning are closely inter-related and the judicious integration of both can enable students to organise and process their knowledge at the touch of keyboard button. This innovative approach to language learning, which is a variation from the conventional classroom-based-instruction, will definitely yield exciting and rewarding results in language teaching.

Over the years, a wide variety of teaching aids have been placed at the disposal of language teachers. Charts, slides, tape-recorders, videos, overhead projectors and many other technological innovations have taken the place of traditional chalk and board, though not completely. Computers are the latest among the aids used for instructional purposes. Besides being powerful and stimulating aids, computers offer great potential for language learning.

Computers are effecting fundamental changes not only in the society outside the classroom walls but also within them. The invasion of the electronic media has revolutionised language teaching methodology. Computers are now used as effective tools in teaching grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and comprehension and even in developing interactive communication skills and in creating writing activities.

While talking about bridging the gap between computers and language teaching gives the perspective that CALL programmes have the potential to be used as individual teaching programmes.

Advantages of a CALL classroom

- Computer Assisted Language Learning enhances the motivation level of students.
- Teachers can customise any CALL program to the syllabus or course design that they are using to increase the level of proficiency in students.
- Computers are useful in-group activities as well as in imparting individualised instruction, which is rarely possible in a traditional classroom.
- There are no limitations with regard to practice-sessions or time. Students can have as many practice-sessions as they wish, repeat the tasks any number of times to acquire mastery and select the material according to their individual requirements. Thus the computer is an efficient learner-centred device.
- It has a powerful self-access facility and gives immense scope for self-learning.
- Teachers in language classes give students exercises to write. Students most often do not revise or correct the scripts immediately even though they are incorrect. The computer helps to reduce this handicap. CALL software has tutorial modes, which help the students explore the correct answers and learn from the errors they make.
- As computers can store, access and analyse more data than books, they create a technology enabled exciting learning environment.

- Computers maximize learning opportunities for their students.

ADVANTAGES

The immediate feedback given by computers helps the students to analyse patterns in the language. The novelty that is an integral part of CALL programmes increases the motivational level of students.

CALL programmes besides helping the learner to learn a foreign language or a second language, also provides some computer literacy which is becoming essential in a technological era, and could be of great help in the future training and career prospects. CALL programmes provide the information requested in a very short time, almost instantaneously.

By using CALL method the students will not only learn more number of words but also the usage of those words as well. The advantage of using CALL method is that they can do the entire study skill activity at their own pace and time using their own learning styles and strategies. Also, integrating CALL with language teaching provides the learner with an opportunity to become part of the skills. They are learning and address their subject related issues by the study skills approach. Having introduced to CALL method of learning at the tertiary level, the learners will continue the exercise of study skills approach and achieve distinctive mastery in their subjects when they come to their higher semesters.

LIMITATIONS

The computer is a means of communication between the programmer and the user. However in this analogy, the author and the programmer do not mostly share similar concerns. While the author is bound to be a subject expert, the programmer is mostly a technician. This gap between the author and the programmer is responsible for inappropriate lesson content, poor documentation, errors in format and content, improper feedback, etc. found in some CALL materials. Likewise, in most of the software packages, there is little chance for the teacher to add or modify the existing programmes, even if he wishes too, since most of its locked to prevent pirating. And for the few of those who develop their own material, the time spent on preparation and programming can be quite lengthy running to hours and days.

But, these limitations or problems should be seen in the backdrop of a development stage of computerisation. The rapidity with which computer integrated activities and taking place in the academic sphere shows that the drawbacks found in the CALL methods are only temporary. The next generation of teachers and learners will be part of a computer generation. They will take for granted the skills demanded by computer technology and handle them as coolly as switching on a tape recorder or watching a television.

CONCLUSION

The language teacher, who has the prime objective to develop study skills in learners, seeks to make an effective use of the computer-assisted language learning method. An analysis of the methods discussed so far leads the researcher to conclude that it is ultimately the teacher who has to be more innovative, more resourceful, and more thoughtful to create awareness in

students about the importance of the study skills in English and to provide opportunities to practice the language by using CALL.

Computers make excellent teaching tools, especially in teaching languages in any aspect, be it vocabulary, grammar, composition, pronunciation, or other linguistic and pragmatic-communicative skills. The major benefits offered by computer in enhancing language acquisition apparently outweigh its limitations.

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