

Issues of Computer Assisted Language Learning Normalization in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

The use of computers in language learning is increased widely in most countries. Many educational institutions all over the world have integrated computer technology into language instruction. However, this integration is not successful in many institutions. There are many issues that hinder the integration of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) into language learning. This paper reports on the literature associated with issues of CALL normalisation. It highlights the issues of CALL normalisation in English as foreign language (EFL) contexts and explores the most important factors to be considered to improve the use of CALL in these contexts. This paper also adds some issues that were not mentioned in the previous studies. It is suggested that for CALL normalisation to be occurred, five major issues should be addressed (i.e., personal, technical, pedagogical, socio-cultural, and institutional). Some suggestions are presented to help CALL to be normalized in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Normalisation, Integration, Personal, Technical, Pedagogical, Socio-cultural

1. Introduction

Computers are used widely in teaching and learning languages. They are used for many applications in the teaching and learning process. Davies (2010) distinguishes two main types of computer applications in language teaching and learning. They are: (a) those that involve the use of generic software tools such as word processors, presentation software, e-mail packages, and web browsers; and (b) those designed specifically to promote language learning. The use of computers in language learning is studied under the area of CALL. CALL is defined by Davies (2010, p. 261) 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 was started to be used in the 1960s. It was associated with programmed learning which was based on a behavioristic approach to language learning. In the 1970s and 1980s, CALL became wider because of the advent of microcomputers. The World Wide Web – launched in the 1990s- offered a variety of roles in language teaching and learning. Using computers in language teaching and learning became a "fashion" for many institutions. Many colleges established language labs equipped with different types of information and communication technology (ICT) designed for language teaching and learning.

CALL in EFL contexts cannot be implemented in the way as it is integrated at US, UK or other European universities. CALL integration can be different from a context to another. There are many issues for successful implementation of CALL which should be considered. Chambers and Bax (2006) introduces some of the issues that CALL practitioners should consider to achieve the state of CALL normalisation. The purpose of this paper is to discuss these issues in details and apply them to the context of EFL. It also tries to investigate more issue related to this context. The paper discusses the most important issues under five major categories (i.e., personal, technical, pedagogical, socio-cultural, and institutional).

2. Review of literature

2.1 *What is Normalisation?*

Television, mobiles and other technologies, which once were considered very modern inventions, become normal and essential in our daily life. Similarly, computers become normal in the life of millions of people around the world. They are important part in many aspects of our daily life. However, in language instruction, it seems that computers did not reach the same stage. There are some teachers, students, and even managers who still think that computers are "extraordinary", and they have some kind of negative perceptions about their benefits in language teaching and learning.

When computer is considered as normal, then the stage of normalisation can be achieved. According to Bax (2003) normalisation is the stage when a technology is invisible, hardly even recognized as a technology, taken for granted in everyday life. Some elements should be considered to achieve this stage. Bax (2003) summarizes these elements as follows:

CALL will reach this state when computers ... are used every day by language students and teachers as an integral part of every lesson, like a pen or a book. Teachers and students will use them without fear or inhibition, and equally without an exaggerated respect for what they can do. They will not be the centre of any lesson, but they will play a part in almost all. They will be completely integrated into all other aspects of classroom life, alongside course books, teachers and notepads. They will go almost unnoticed. (p.23)

In the literature, there are some other terms that are used as an alternative term for normalisation (e.g., integration). According to Ruthven-Stuart (2003) ICT integration has three stages; acquisition, introduction and maintenance. The acquisition stage means the purchase of hardware. Introduction is composed of three elements: a) deciding where and how to locate the hardware and software, b) a comprehensive description of the role technology will play in language teaching, and c) the process of acquainting the stakeholders with the technology so they can use it efficiently and effectively. Two aspects are considered in maintenance (a) the need to ensure that the technology remains up and running and (b) ensuring that the technology is being used to achieve the goals laid down in the language curriculum.

2.2 CALL Normalisation Issues

Many issues are essential to reach the state of CALL normalisation. The first attempt to address these issues was done by Chambers and Bax (2006). They introduced eleven issues that are important to achieve the state of CALL normalisation. They have clustered these issues into four groups: (logistics; stakeholders' conceptions, knowledge and abilities, syllabus and software integration; and training, development and support). For the purpose of inclusive analysis, this paper classifies the issues of CALL normalisation into five major categories (i.e., personal, pedagogical, technical, institutional, and socio-cultural).

2.2.1 Personal Issues

The use of CALL can be enhanced by issues related to teachers, students, administrators, and policy makers. The success or failure of CALL depends mostly on the users who are going to utilize it. Many studies examined the effects of personal issues related to teachers and students on CALL integration. (e.g., Chen, 2008; Egbert, Paulus & Nakamichi, 2002; McCarthy, 1999; Mumtaz, 2000). They concluded that lack of time, support and resources prohibits the use of CALL activities in classrooms.

2.2.2 Technical Issues

Many colleges install high-tech labs designed for language teaching and learning. However, the use of these labs does not match the cost of their establishment. In many situations, language labs are not well exploited by language teachers and learners. This happens because of many factors, such as ICT location, and classroom organization. To make full use of computer technology in language teaching and learning, some issues should be considered.

2.2.3 Pedagogical Issues

CALL is not compulsory for teachers and students in many universities. Also, many EFL courses are taught in traditional ways. Teachers still use "talk-and-chalk" ways of teaching, and students like "pen-and-paper" ways of learning. Very few materials require CALL activities to be used along with the textbooks. Many textbooks are not flexible to integrate CALL. Therefore, CALL seems to be an extra "burden" for both EFL teachers and learners. Moreover, the instruction processes from teaching to testing still depend mostly on traditional techniques. Teachers and students are tied up to textbooks. Few CALL materials may match the content of the textbooks. Therefore, teachers tend to neglect using CALL materials.

2.2.4 Socio-Cultural Issues

CALL integration is also influenced by socio-cultural issues. Considering these issues will help creating a positive environment for CALL. Dewachi (2002) as cited in Albirini (2006) notes that "cultural impediments" are responsible for the Arab States' slow launch into the new information and communication age and their inadequate exploitation of the internet. Also, Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, and Harkrider (1999) consider cultural perceptions among five main factors that may determine ICT adoption by educators. Some EFL teachers do not want to integrate CALL in their teaching because they are afraid of the influence of "foreign" cultures on their learners. Some teachers still think that many CALL materials- either available on CD-ROMs or on the internet- are not appropriate to their learners. Al-Oteawi (2002) finds that teachers refrain from using the internet in the classroom for fear of the ethically inappropriate material on the internet.

2.2.5 Institutional Issues

The success of CALL integration also depends on the types and objectives that the institution will invest. There are many reasons for the institution to integrate CALL. The level of administrative support to language teachers plays a major role in the success of CALL implementation. Financial incentives or any other form of rewards to the teachers are important factor to keep the dynamic of teachers in implementing CALL.

2.3 *Rationale and Research Objectives*

In many educational institutions, computer labs are installed with many computers and the latest versions of hardware and software. Many courses are provided with CALL materials that can be used inside or outside the classroom. Nemours web sites are designed for language learning. However, the implementation of CALL is still very low in many institutions. Many studies examined the issues that help CALL be fully implemented. They examined the issues related to teachers, technology, and pedagogy in general. An inclusive analysis of the issues of CALL normalisation for EFL is needed. Thus, this paper tries to discuss these issues inclusively. The paper addresses the following objectives:

1. To find out the current state of CALL in some EFL countries.
2. To discuss the issues that make CALL normalised.

3. To examine the most important issues for CALL normalisation in EFL contexts.

3. The Current State of CALL in Some EFL Countries

The situation of teaching English as foreign language is different from the situation of teaching English as a mother tongue or as a first language. Therefore, the use of CALL will be different according to the context where it is used. The state of CALL in developed countries will somewhat be different from the state of CALL in developing countries and in the third world countries. Fernando (2009, p.2274) pointed out that "In many cases, e-learning cannot be implemented in the way it is done at US or European universities. The approach has to be tailored to the environment, if it is to be a success."

The integration of CALL in most Arab world countries requires a particular educational, administrative and technological environment, and the higher educational system also needs to undergo changes. Many problems face the integration of CALL in most Arab world countries. For example, few students have their own computers, while the majority of the students use common lab facilities to access computers. However, in many cases, labs are open only during working hours and usually scheduled for different groups of students. Moreover, political and economic affairs can affect the integration of CALL. Frequent workers strikes and long electricity power cuts are examples of political and economic affairs.

A very serious problem in most of the third world countries is the low quality of education. The focus in most of these countries is on theoretical education. Many educational institutions still follow outdated curricula of teaching languages. Lack of teachers' technical support and inadequate budgets are also important problems face the integration of CALL in these countries.

However, there are some exceptions. There are some Arab countries in which the situation of ICT is very bright. According to ITU (2011) estimates, internet users in Saudi Arabia in 2011 are 11, 400,000 which are 43.6 % of the population. Also, large portions of higher education budgets are allocated to provide new technology in Saudi Arabia. This situation may lead to a better use of CALL. Almost all Saudi government-funded universities integrated ICT in their teaching as well as administrative activities. Classrooms are equipped with computer technology such as a computer, a projector, speakers, and so on. Though ICT is used widely in Saudi universities, CALL is not fully integrated. Some studies examined the state of CALL in Saudi Arabia. (e.g., Alasmari, 2005; Al-Jarf, 2005a, b; Zaid, 2011). Al-Jarf (2005b) found that the failure of ICT use in some Saudi universities was due to a number of factors: cultural factors, technical issues, and linguistics factors. Teacher training in using new technology in teaching English was also examined by Alasmari (2005) who found that to increase internet use, EFL teachers need to be given more in-service training. Zaid (2011) explored the effectiveness of organized email exchanges and online reading utilizing web quests on developing reading and writing of college students. Findings indicated improved attitudes towards English upon utilizing this collaborative way of learning.

4. Issues for CALL Normalisation in EFL Context

Using technology has a very bright condition in many countries. However, CALL is not fully implemented in many educational institutions. There are many issues should be considered to make CALL normalized in these settings. The following section will discuss the issues CALL practitioners should bear in mind when CALL is to be implemented.

4.1 Personal Issues

Technology without human beings cannot create a good environment for language teaching and learning. Also, the users of technology have very important roles in the processes of language teaching and learning. Many issues related to individuals (i.e. teachers, students, and administrators) should be considered when CALL is integrated.

There are some external factors that influence the teachers' use of CALL in their instruction. These factors are: ICT knowledge, lack of support from administrators, training, and accessibility, scheduling problems, lack of time to prepare lessons, connectivity, and home access. There are some other internal factors that influence the teachers' use of CALL in their instruction (e.g., teachers' attitudes, and teacher beliefs). There are also some instructional factors that influence the teachers' use of CALL. Problems with assessment and teaching experience are some of these factors.

4.1.1 ICT Knowledge

There are some basic ICT skills teachers need to know in order to implement CALL well. According to the report done by Directorate General Education and Culture (n.d.) language teachers need to:

- recognise the individual learning problems of learners;
- make a careful and considered choice concerning the use of the media;
- check the truth of information content offered;
- develop efficient search techniques and be capable of conducting effective research with the help of the computer;
- be able to use standard software confidently and competently;
- make wise and critical choices of information found. (p.10)

Teachers' ICT illiteracy is a very crucial factor. Schemidt (1995), as cited in AlKahtani (2007), surveyed faculty who were still not using or integrating technology into their work and found that they did not use technology due to a lack of knowledge in operating them despite their awareness of the technology impact on education. Chambers and Bax (2006, p.473) point out that "for normalisation to take place, teachers and managers need to have enough knowledge of and ability with computers to feel confident in using them."

Nowadays, most of the learners are accustomed to using many types of technologies in their daily activities. This generation is described by many authors as the "net generation" and the

people of this generation are called "the digital natives". However, this does not mean that they automatically know how to study using CALL programmes in their learning. For CALL to be normalised, language learners need basic skills that are required for implementing CALL technology.

4.1.2 Training

The successful integration of CALL is also based on teacher training. Technology without teachers cannot create a good environment for language learning. However, teacher training in using technology is not enough. Teacher training should be done in two related directions: (a) using technology such as operating computer programs, and other applications; and (b) applying technology effectively for language learning. Teachers should be exposed to the latest trends in ELT methodologies and approaches.

Teacher training does not mean its formal ways which mean attending seminars, workshops, and so on, but it can be occurred in different ways. As Chambers and Bax (2006, p.475) point out "One way of doing this is to see development not in terms of training workshops but as an ongoing process, possibly through the formation of teams of 'experts' working with 'non-experts'".

A teacher in Park and Son (2009) recommended school-based small-group teacher training in which a CALL specialist visits the school and teach them how to use computers for language teaching to the current situation of the school. Chambers and Bax (2006, p.475) state that "If CALL is to be normalised, teacher training and development may best be offered in collaborative mode rather than in 'top-down' expert-to-novice mode."

Unfortunately, many educational institutions are aware that their teaching staff needs ICT training, but very few realize that their learners also need ICT training. There are some important issues that language learners should be qualified with when they use CALL. For example, learners need to be trained properly for their written assignments, how to cite sources, and avoid plagiarism. Learners need to be trained to move from traditional face-to-face learning to be able to study in CALL settings. For CALL normalisation, language learners need to be qualified with the basic rules and conditions of using CALL materials.

4.1.3 Technical Support

Lack of technical support hinders the smooth release of language classes and affects the flow of classroom activities. The respondents of the Becta Survey (2004) stated that "technical faults might discourage them from using ICT in their teaching because of the fear of equipment breaking down during a lesson". Chambers and Bax (2006, p.476) pointed out that "Successful normalisation requires that teachers' concerns about technical failures, and their lack of skills to deal with such failures, be addressed and overcome by means of reliable support and encouragement"

It is also necessary to determine the teachers' existing technical skills and the gaps in teachers' ICT knowledge. There are some examples of checklists that can be used as a starting point to determine the technical skills language teachers need to know (e.g., ict4lt).

4.1.4 Time

Successful integration of CALL requires enough time to plan lessons, find suitable internet sites, and check software to choose the areas that are related to the objectives of the lessons, and so on. Jones (2001, p.365) points out that “what really prevents teachers from following an interest in CALL is lack of time, since they tend to be sufficiently burdened already by their conventional administrative and classroom duties.”

Chambers and Bax (2006, p.471) point out that "For teachers to ‘normalise’ computer use within their daily practice, they may need additional time for preparation and planning."

4.1.5 Beliefs

Teachers' beliefs about CALL are shaped by their previous experiences as learners, by social, economic and political contexts. The environment where they grew up and the institutions where they worked are also important to shape the teachers beliefs about CALL and its benefits in language teaching and learning. Cuban (2001) as cited in Kumar and Tammelin (2008) pointed out that teachers will use technology only if they perceive it to enhance instruction. For CALL normalisation, teachers need to have positive attitudes towards CALL and its benefits in language teaching and learning.

It is supposed that because the learners grow up in a technology environment, they have positive attitudes and beliefs about technology and its benefits for all aspects of life. A number of studies have examined the students' attitudes and beliefs about CALL. They concluded that many students had a positive attitude towards CALL. Today's learners are equipped with technology. Their use of technology enables them to be more confident in using CALL in language learning. Colley et al. (1994) as cited in McMahan, Gardner, Gray and Mulhern (1999) found that participation in a computer course significantly reduced anxiety and increased confidence among students (both males and females). However, this is not the case for all situations. There are still some situations in which learners are not ICT literate and they are afraid of using technology in their learning. For CALL normalisation, language learners need to have positive attitudes towards CALL.

4.1.6 Administrators Issues

To some extent, the administrators play a crucial role to make CALL successful. Their beliefs and attitudes towards CALL is an important factor. The way that they plan to use CALL is a significant factor that should be considered. The administrators need some basic ICT knowledge to accept the integration of CALL at their institutions.

4.2 Technical Issues

Many colleges install high-tech labs designed for language teaching and learning. However, the use of these labs does not match the objectives and the cost of their establishment. In

many situations, language labs are not well exploited by language teachers and learners. This happens because of many factors, such as ICT location, and classroom organization. To make full use of computer technology in language teaching and learning, the following issues should be considered.

4.2.1 Location

Computer equipments should not be separated from classes. Instead, computers should be a part of the classroom. When computers are separated and put in language labs or "language learning centers", their benefits are reduced. Scheduling problems, unexpected breakdowns because of others use and class clashes are some examples of problems that may occur in such situations. Instead, the classroom can be equipped with enough computers and the learners can use them when required. Chambers and Bax (2006, p.470) point out that "for normalisation to take place, CALL facilities will ideally not be separated from 'normal' teaching space."

4.2.2 Organization

Classrooms with computer technology can be organized in different ways. Some ways will be easier and beneficial for effective use of CALL. There are many ways of organizing computer technologies in classrooms. Chambers and Bax (2006, p.470) point out that "for normalisation to occur, the classroom will ideally be organised so as to allow for an easy move from CALL activities to non-CALL activities". It is important to locate the proper amount of and right types of technology where teachers and students can effectively use them.

4.2.3 Adequacy

In many cases, the teachers have basic ICT skills and they perceive the benefits of CALL and they are willing to integrate CALL into their instruction, but the resources are inadequate. The inadequacy of CALL resources can occur in different forms. Few computers devoted for language teachers and learners is one of the problems that face CALL integration. . Pelgrum (2001) as cited in Becta (2004, p. 12) found that the most frequently mentioned problem when teachers were asked about obstacles to their use of ICT was the insufficient number of computer available to them. Also, inadequacy of CALL software is considered another issue that hinder CALL implementation. The teacher may not have enough options to choose the suitable software to match the content of a lesson. A third issue is that computers are not connected to the internet

4.2.4 Quality

The quality of hardware, software is a factor that affect the integration of CALL. Preston et al. (2000) as cited in Becta (2004) suggest that teachers are less enthusiastic about using ICT where the equipment available is old and unreliable.

4.3 Pedagogical Issues

Technology should be used under the command of pedagogy. Textbooks can be designed in a way that requires CALL materials to be implemented. According to a teacher participated in the study of Park and Son (2009), "having a flexible curriculum is a first step to facilitate technology use in the classroom.

4.3.1 Methodology

Outdated methodologies do not require technology to be used. Old methods don not encourage the use of CALL materials. These approaches neglect the skills that language learners need for their future life. It can be assumed that new methods require new technologies. Therefore, for CALL normalisation, recent ELT methodologies are required so that it will urge for CALL implementation.

4.3.2 Textbooks

Almost all of the textbooks used for EFL learners are imported from European countries. Some of them were written for "any users". They may contain some aspects that these learners cannot cope with (for example, to talk or write about famous European film stars). Another issue is that most of these textbooks do not match the time allotted for them. Many units should be taught in a short period. In this case, the teachers tend to finish the book in the prescribed time and then neglect some extra activities especially CALL activities. CALL activities are neglected because they will not appear in the final exams which will be held with pen-and-paper methods. Therefore, to make CALL normalised, the textbooks should be designed to suit the level of the existing learners and match the time allotted for them, and encourage CALL to be implemented.

4.3.3 The Objectives

It seems that many textbooks used for EFL learners do not match the EFL learners' needs and objectives. The selection of textbooks in many cases depends on surface factors such as the publisher, authors, the cost, the availability, and so on. Most of these textbooks are attached with CALL materials (e.g., CD-ROMs and DVDs). However, their use is limited because of many factors. One of these factors is the objectives of these textbooks do not match the needs and objectives of the learners use them. Chambers and Bax (2006, p.474) pointed out that "progress towards normalisation may be enhanced by the use of 'authorable' CALL materials which allow teachers to tailor the CALL activities better to fit the existing syllabus aims, as opposed to the use of imported 'closed' materials."

4.4 Socio-Cultural Issues

The implementation of CALL is also influenced by the cultural perceptions of teachers and students. These perceptions are crucial factors for the implementation of CALL at any stage of CALL integration. There are some issues that can be discussed under the socio-cultural issues. The content and fear of influence are among them.

4.4.1 The content

Some CALL materials are considered irrelevant to some contexts. The content may contain some aspects which can be considered as "immoral" or "offensive". For example, a kissing scene between male and female can be considered immoral for many Arab EFL learners. The solution to this issue is encouraging teachers to use "authorable" software; this may help to achieve successful integration of CALL. The participants to Albirini (2006) emphasized the need for Arab-made software that integrates the values, ethics and the way of thinking of Arab people. Fodje (1999) as cited in Albirini (1999) point out that

What the world needs today is not talent in producing new technologies but talent in understanding the impact of technology on the society and individuals...Educational programs in the third world heretofore have been designed around the Western ideals. These need to be reworked to reflect the indigenous cultures and promote human values while at the same time producing the talent for 'controlled' technological advancement. (p. 60)

4.4.2 Fear of Influence

The "digital age" facilitates culture transfer. This leads some people to think about anything coming from other cultures. They are afraid of the influence of "foreign" cultures on their young people. To some extent, this may affect the flow of CALL integration. Some CALL materials are not welcomed by these people because they do not match the culture of their learners. At first stages, local software or modified CALL can be used to overcome this kind of fear.

4.5 Institutional Issues

The success of CALL integration also depends on the objectives that the institution had chosen to implement CALL. The institution may implement CALL for quality assurance. It may be because of competition with other institutions. The fashion of ICT labs is an important aspect of modern universities that make many institutions tried to achieve.

The level of administrative support to language teachers plays a major role in the success of CALL implementation. Administrative encouragement and rewards to the teachers are important factor to keep the dynamic of teachers in implementing CALL.

5. Conclusions

EFL contexts need special attention when CALL is implemented. Many issues should be considered. This paper presents a number of issues that help CALL normalized in EFL contexts. These issues are discussed under five major categories. The paper concluded that a great shift in the perceptions of language teachers, students and managers towards CALL needs to be manipulated. The integration of CALL should be accompanied with teacher training for the latest trends in language teaching methodologies. CALL practitioners and designers should be aware of the culture of the language learners and their society. Studies are needed to examine the issues of CALL normalisation in poor countries. They may find different issues that could be considered.

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