

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

In the second half of the 20th century, education technologies were one of the most developed areas in the world. Computers, which have entered the school life in the late 1950s in developed countries, are still developing day by day throughout the world. Today, they have become more powerful, faster, easier to use, more convenient and cheaper, and they can process and store much more data, as well.

The computer

Computer is a device that processes information with great speed and accuracy. Computers process information by helping to create the information itself, by displaying, storing, recognizing, and communicating information to other computers. In general they process numbers, words, pictures, and sounds. The computer has changed the way people work, learn, communicate, and play. It is used by students, teachers, and research scientists as a learning tool all over the world, as well as by individuals at home to study, work and entertain.

The computer is a human made tool which is incapable of action. That is, it has no inborn wisdom, no initiative and inherent ability to learn or to teach. It will perform, with remarkable speed, the instructions exactly given to it by a human user. Thus, the computer is '*the servant of the user*' and it should not be forgotten that its role in teaching is solely a teaching aid. Consequently, it is dependent on the teacher in many ways: for example, it is unable to create educational materials without the teacher.

The computer can be situated in the classroom, in a special laboratory (CALL laboratory), in a specially designed area of a library or in any convenient location where the student, or small groups of students can work uninterruptedly. It can be used as *the mainstay of a course, back up, revision, or reinforcement*.

The unique property of the computer as a medium for education is its ability **to interact with the student**. Books and tape recording can tell a student what the rules are and what the right solutions are, but they cannot analyze the specific mistake the student has made and react in a manner which leads him not only to correct his mistake, but also to understand the principles behind the correct solution.

The Internet

The internet is a computer-based worldwide information network. It is composed of a large number of smaller interconnected networks called internets. These internets may connect tens, hundreds or thousands of computers, enabling them to share information.

The rise of computer-mediated communication and the Internet has reshaped the use of computers for language learning at the end of the 20th century. With the arrival of the Internet, the computer -both in society and in the classroom- has been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and *communication*.

CALL

The abbreviation CALL stands for Computer Assisted Language Learning. It is a term used by teachers and students to describe the use of computers as part of a language course. It refers to the sets of instructions which need to be loaded into the computer for it to be able to work in the language classroom.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CALL

Having settled the issue as to whether computers can or cannot teach real language from a communicative point of view, perhaps we should now put CALL programs in their real perspective and consider some of their advantages and limitations.

➤ Advantages:

- CALL programs help language learners improve their language skills.
- Multimodal practice with immediate feedback.
- Individualization in a large class.
- Pair or small group work on projects.
- The fun factor.
- Variety in the resources available and learning styles used.
- The vocabulary software has started to be contextualized and to incorporate graphics, audio recording and playback.
- Besides teaching a foreign language, CALL programs will provide the learner with some sort of computer literacy, which is becoming essential in our modern society and which could be of great help in future training and career prospects.
- More sophisticated error-checking can provide students real help in the feedback they receive, directing them to further practice or moving them to the next stage.
- The computer gives individual attention to the learner and replies to him.
- It can repeat an activity without any of the errors arising from repetition by humans.

➤ Disadvantages :

Although computers in language classes have an important role in language learning process, there are some disadvantages of CALL.

- CALL requires computers and software as well as other equipment all of which are expensive.
- Students need to learn about computer use (Learners who do not have prior experience in using the keyboard may waste a lot of valuable time identifying in order to print their responses).
- Teachers should be well trained in the use of computers.
- The computer programs used with learners or demonstrated to teachers can be overtaken by a power cut, or mechanical failure.
- Working with computers normally means that the learners work in *isolation*. This obviously does not help in developing normal communication between the learners, which is a crucial aim in any language lesson.
- It is more tiring to read from a screen than from a printed text.
- The teacher must feel comfortable in the computer lab and with the medium in order to be able to use it effectively.