A STUDY OF COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

IN COLLEGE ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA

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Abstract

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Given the strong criticism and increasing pressure on college English education in China, it is urgent to find positive means to improve English teaching and learning in an EFL setting. This paper attempts to explore the status of the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in English education nationally and internationally by providing its positive effects and revealing its drawbacks and limitations as well. The practical significance of this study is to convince teachers of English in China that they can employ CALL in English classrooms as a tool to improve students' linguistic competence in English. Also, teachers can exploit CALL to improve their teaching effectiveness by integrating CALL into college English education in China. However, teachers in China must bear in mind that they can abuse CALL by no means and drawbacks of CALL should never be neglected.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years, English teaching and learning in China have confronted with vehement criticism and greater pressure for the low efficiency in improving students' acquisition of English and the least attraction or vigor in English classrooms. This paper attempts to explore the status of the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in English education nationally and internationally by providing its positive effects and revealing its drawbacks and limitations as well.

With the appearance of computer in the 20th century and the rapid development of computer and information technology, they have resulted in profound and massive impacts on all aspects of the world. In terms of the applications of computer technology in second language acquisition, CALL has become quite common for all levels of educational institutions nowadays. Liu, Moore, Graham and Lee (2002) conclude that at present benefits of CALL have been acknowledged and educators consider it as an effective instructional tool.

This paper is to confirm the positive functions of CALL in college English education in China. By providing the advantages of CALL and revealing the drawbacks of CALL in language teaching and learning, the practical significance of this paper is to convince teachers of English in China that by integrating CALL into college English education they can help students who are staying in an EFL setting promote second language acquisition and also improve their teaching effectiveness in the classrooms. In the meantime, teachers of college English in China should always bear in mind that they will abuse CALL by no means in the

classrooms although they are encouraged to exploit the full potential of CALL in English

teaching and learning.

Statement of the Problem

CALL has been applied in second language acquisition in China over decades. In this paper, three problems will be addressed. To what extent the use of CALL can improve linguistic competence in English for students? In what ways can CALL help teachers to improve teaching effectiveness in English classrooms? In what ways may teachers abuse CALL in English classrooms, contributing to violent attacks against the use of CALL in English education by some scholars, educators, and teachers?

Definitions of Terms

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL): refers to the use of technology in the form of computers for educational purposes, exclusively in the field of language teaching and learning (Timucin, 2006).

multiliteracies: a term which is based on the widely accepted conception that technologies including computers, the internet, have changed the nature of texts and also the way people access and deal with texts (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008).

Method of Approach

A review of literature on the use of CALL in English education was conducted, using the Karrmann Library of the University of Wisconsin Platteville. The findings were summarized and then recommendations were made. The databases available through EBSCOHOST, Eric and Wilson Database were used for the review of literature. The search

term was limited to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

No one can deny that computer is one of the greatest inventions in the 20th century.

Computer technology has brought about great changes to the whole world. With the rapid

development of computer and information technology, it has been widely used in all aspects

of society. There is no exception to the application of computer and information technology

in the field of education. In the past decades, CALL has been widely applied in language

teaching and learning.

Accordingly, CALL has become an important part of academic study on language

learning and teaching. Many researchers and educators advocate and support the wide use of

CALL in language course while some scholars and teachers claim great doubts about or

strongly criticize the use of CALL in language teaching and learning. For years, it has

become a heated and controversial issue among researchers, scholars and teachers in second

language acquisition.

Background Information about CALL

New terminology has consistently occurred with the advancement of computer and

information technology applied in education. At the outset the term computer assisted

instruction (CAI) was widely used as referring to the applications of computer technology in

education. However, it has to date become common that the term computer assisted learning

(CAL) has substituted the term computer assisted instruction (CAI) which signifies great changes of educational philosophy in recent years. Several decades ago, teachers used to focus on traditional teacher-centered instructions but now they have come to a better understanding about the importance and significance of creating student-centered learning environment. As it is exclusively referred to language learning, the term computer assisted language learning (CALL) becomes dominant. Liu, Moore, Graham, and Lee (2002) concluded that at present benefits of CALL have been acknowledged and educators consider it as an effective instructional tool.

Li (2007) explained that since1960s computers have been employed in teaching and at that time the focal use of computer centered upon grammar, drills and translation, resulting from behaviorist theories of learning. Li (2007) argued that at present CALL is dominantly employed in compliance with constructivist theories of learning though in 1970s and 1980s CALL based on cognitive theories of learning was well received. Davies (2002) claimed that over the years CALL has come to the third phase of using multimedia and internet.

Positive Effects of CALL

With the widespread use of CALL in language courses, it has brought two major benefits to language teaching and learning. For the first part, the use of CALL in English teaching and learning helps promote students' linguistic competence in English. Green (2005) reported that teachers can make full use of CALL to improve students' acquisition of English as an effective supplement to the traditional curriculum in English course. Liu et al. (2002) summarized the findings that students can not only improve their vocabulary

acquisition and reading comprehension by the use of visual media, but promote the writing skills by the use of online communication tools as well. Abraham (2008) provided evidence indicating that computer-mediated text glosses play a positive role in promoting second language reading comprehension and expanding vocabulary. Lin (2010) reported the results about positive impacts of CALL on improving second language learners' reading comprehension and listening proficiency. Jia (2010) revealed the findings that CALL can play a promising role to promote students' extensive reading and vocabulary learning. To sum up, the use of CALL can produce positive impacts on learners' second language acquisition in terms of vocabulary, listening, extensive reading.

For the second part, teachers can employ CALL to improve teaching effectiveness in English classrooms. To begin with, the use of CALL in English teaching and learning can spur students' motivation in language learning. In recent decades, a growing body of literature has been examined that motivation is one of the predominant factors of success in second language learning. Engin (2009) noted that motivation of learners means sufficient willingness and eagerness of learners to improve their competence to comprehend, write and speak the second language. Lei (2010) listed the leading advantages of extrinsic motivation: it can guarantee students' active engagement in class discussion; it is positively connected to learning and achievement; it is positively related to outlook on competence and self-efficacy. As motivation of students plays an essential role in successful second language learning, both students and instructors from all parts of the world aspire to get some clues on cultivation of motivation with learners in the classrooms. Actually, many scholars and teachers have examined the use of CALL and reported the findings that the use of CALL to greater extent

helps cultivate motivation among learners in English learning. Kong (2009) stressed that in the area of computer assisted language learning, a large number of research and studies have overwhelmingly centered upon how the novel means can spur and cultivate motivation in language learning among learners.

Additionally, the use of CALL signifies that teachers and students have access to authentic language learning environment. Garrett (2009) explained the term authentic features those materials which are created by native speakers and for native speakers rather than for philosophy or principles of education. It is commonly accepted that CALL can provide abundant and authentic English materials and context for learners and they may even have access to immediate feedback. Jia (2010) emphasized that CALL is in particular convenient and useful for students in an EFL setting who have no chance to stay in authentic language learning context. Chapelle (2009) argued that computer and information technology greatly expands and transforms the ways learners are exposed to the second language with respect to its width and depth.

Moreover, the use of CALL in language course means connecting students with the rapidly changing world where younger generations are raised and living. The use of multimedia will support the development of students' multiliteracy (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008). According to Michele and Bull's definition (2006), a multi literate person refers to one who has flexibility and feels at ease in the process of literate activities involved with texts and technologies. Borsheim, Merritt and Reed (2008) stressed the agreed assumption that technologies including computers, internet and Web 2.0 applications such as wikis, blogs, and the like have highly influenced the nature of texts and the ways we use and interact

with texts. It is the truth that a large number of reference books in many libraries around the world have become online databases and most students will make full use of the online library databases and internet resources to accomplish their assignments or conduct their research work. Hence, with the application of CALL in English classrooms, teachers should take the responsibility to assist students in how to search, locate, sort, gather, evaluate, manage and cite the articles from the online library databases and internet resources for the sake of their research work (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008).

Finally, CALL means providing more opportunities for learners in language classrooms. Chapelle (2009) emphasized that nowadays the main task of CALL is to achieve the aim of arranging and conveying professional knowledge in a way that functions well for creating opportunities and presenting effective learning. Liu et al. (2002) reported that till now all sorts of internet tools such as emails, online chat, bulletin boards, HTML and digital video are used in second language course. In other words, it is manifest that students possess a variety of choices in English learning with the help of CALL. Some students may prefer writing emails as a way to improve their writing skills. Some students may choose online chat as a way to realize their communication in English with their peers. Hauk and Young (2008) reported the findings that learners who command the ability of making good use of online environment and involve in interaction with peers do improve their performance in language learning and increase their awareness of diverse cultures. Some students may enjoy reading HTML so as to increase their reading skills. Others may have fun watching digital videos in order to get to know about different cultures in English-speaking nations. In this sense, CALL offers a wide range of channels for students to get actively involved in English learning. As

long as learners become familiar with some of these multiple channels, they can eventually form individual learning strategies. Li (2007) noted that CALL may support teachers to satisfy students' distinct needs in learning and it makes diversity in classrooms possible. Borsheim, et al. (2008) stated that the use of multimedia can realize the possibility of the constructivist model of learning which emphasizes that students can make meaning through experiences.

Drawbacks of CALL

However, CALL has both advantages and disadvantages in English learning and teaching. The problems or drawbacks of CALL in English language teaching and learning are listed and illustrated as follows.

In the first place, CALL should not totally substitute teachers' instructions in English course. Computer and information technology cannot replace effective teaching although it is agreed that computers function in a positive way and act as a supplement to traditional curriculum in English language teaching and learning (Green, 2005). Some scholars and teachers worry about the fact that CALL might be abused in English language course. Jiang (2008) expressed a major concern that massive multimedia and software can separate some teachers from their students in the classrooms. To some extent, excessive use of CALL may make teachers become merely operators of computer software or electronic documents although teachers indeed desire heated debates or discussions with students in order to explore the originality in students' mind. To what extent should CALL function as an effective supplement to traditional curriculum without offending or hampering teachers' enthusiasm and innovation in the classrooms? To what extent can the use of CALL in

language classrooms fully support in improving students' language learning instead of distracting students with overwhelmingly fancy information technology? There are always some questions that many teachers and scholars can raise about the use of CALL in language courses. Until now less research has been made to answer these questions and the debate over the use of CALL in language teaching and learning will continue for a long time.

In the second place, consistent training and support in the application of CALL for teachers has become another major concern. Puerto and Gamboa (2009) reported the findings that teachers' command of technology is rather simple but not creative and additional CALL training is greatly needed as for teachers. The study of Kessler and Plakans (2008) indicated that some teachers felt discomfort or less confident with using technology in the class and they desired to have the opportunity of taking the training on a regular basis to become more familiar and confident with the use of technology.

 In the third place, the use of CALL cannot be literally interpreted as the use of technology and it requires that teachers should know exactly how to integrate CALL into language teaching. In other words, many teachers cannot employ CALL in a productive way to improve their teaching effectiveness in the classrooms. According to their study, Kessler and Plakans (2008) pointed out the fact that although some teachers show full confidence in their use of technology in the class, it does not necessarily mean that they can use technology in a creative way to improve the teaching effectiveness. Kennedy and Levy (2009) emphasized that the use of CALL should tailor to the teaching and learning context and then it can fully integrate into a language course.

Lastly, the success of CALL application in language course requires educational

administrators and teachers as well to be patient. Kennedy and Levy (2009) recommend that

educational administrators and educators should regard the use of CALL as a project, which

means they need to take a long-term view of the use of CALL so as to ensure its success.

Timucin (2006) noted that educational administrators spare no time and efforts to provide

support for teachers who may become actively engaged in using technology in the class in the

near future. Garrett (2009) claimed that CALL means that technology, theory and pedagogy

are indispensible three parts with the aim to realize the full potential of CALL in a language

course rather than the simple understanding of the use of technology in class.

Summary

With the proliferation of computer and information technology in language teaching

and learning, CALL has been modified and widely applied in second language learning. For

decades, CALL has produced positive impacts on English education in two aspects. For one

aspect, CALL has played a dominant role in enhancing students' acquisition of English.

Chapelle (2009) concluded that CALL can be employed to offer practice with any particular

part of language learning, such as grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, and writing. For

another aspect, CALL has become an important tool for teachers to improve teaching

effectiveness in classrooms. Firstly, the use of CALL in language courses can help cultivate

students' motivation in language learning. Secondly, the use of CALL means access to

authentic language learning environment for teachers and students as well. Thirdly, the use of

CALL can develop students' multiliteracy so as to keep up with this rapidly changing world

where computer and information technology has become an indispensible part of the whole

society. Put it plainly, CALL entitles students to conducting research work on internet resources or online library databases. Finally, the use of CALL in English learning means more choices or possibilities for students who can attempt various ways to access authentic learning materials and resources, gradually forming their preferred learning strategies. In a sense, CALL offers a wide range of channels for students to get actively involved in English learning.

Nevertheless, drawbacks or limitations of CALL should not be neglected at all by teachers and scholars. It is apparent that CALL cannot substitute teachers' effective teaching in classrooms. Put it simply, teachers cannot totally depend on the use of CALL in language classrooms. They should explore how to integrate the use of CALL into their English courses. In addition to integrating CALL in English teaching and learning, teachers in fact desperately need consistent training and support in the application of CALL or in updating their command of computer and information technology. Murday, Ushida and Chenoweth (2008) argued that when technology is used to access learning recourses unavoidable problems may appear such as annoyance and anxiety. Last but not the least, the success of CALL in language learning and teaching can be expected in the long run with the patience of both administrators and teachers. Tackling the problems mentioned above, administrators, educators, teachers, and learners can truly harvest from realizing the potentials of CALL in English teaching and learning. In the meantime, they can firmly defend against strong doubts and criticism from those opponents who claim that many teachers abuse CALL or CALL have great flaws or deficiencies in language courses.

Chapter 3

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the review of literature related to the use of CALL in language courses

nationally and internationally, the following conclusions can be made. It is advisable that in

China teachers of English hold positive views about the use of CALL in college English

education because a huge body of literature has indicated that the use of CALL can improve

linguistic competence in English for learners. Also, it is highly essential for teachers in China

to integrate CALL into college English education as an instructional tool to improve teaching

effectiveness.

It is universally acknowledged that a variety of disturbing problems exist in Chinese

educational system and college English education has no exception. Whereas, with the advent

of computer and sweeping development of information technology, the use of CALL in

college English teaching and learning may provide many possibilities to solve the problems.

Teachers in China are recommended to employ CALL in English classrooms as a novel and

positive means to transform college English education from traditional teacher-centered

instructions to creating student-centered learning environment which is based on the model of

constructivist learning in second language acquisition. It is recommended that teachers can

have more opportunities to receive consistent training in the application of CALL so that they

can keep up with the fast development of computer and information technology and will not

feel discomfort or anxious about the use of CALL. Also, it is recommended that educational

administrators, scholars, educators, and teachers take a long-term view of the use of CALL so

as to ensure its prosperity and success in college English education in China regardless of the

fact that some teachers may abuse CALL for the time being.

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