Chapter VI

Technology and Language Learning: CALL for India

6.0 Introduction

Learning languages through technology reflects the variety of ways technology can be availed of for skill-building among the learners. With technology, the locus of power in a language classroom has altered from the *sage on the stage* to the students and student teams. This integration of technology into language pedagogy indicates how learning languages through technology provides authentic and collaborative tasks for language development.

The wide researches done on CALL generate the idea that it can become a means to effective learning of English. As a result, the use of technology in the field of education is increasing. While CALL cannot be a complete substitute to the human master/teacher in a non-English speaking country, it can certainly be a very useful tool in the language pedagogy and a good aid for the English teacher in the changed scenario.

While the West and the European countries depend more on the developments in technology, the African and Asian countries still believe in making use of the available human resource. As most of these countries are either developing or underdeveloped, the total replacement of human resource by technology is not desirable. CALL,
as any other technology, has both advantages and disadvantages, but
the wisdom to development lies in discovering ways and means to
encounter the problems and make use of any invention or discovery. It
is not possible for any nation to stall the progress in technological and
scientific arenas or escape the impact of any major development. So,
the educationists should use the technology of CALL to enhance the
English Language teaching/learning process, solving any problems
encountered. A discussion on how it could be done is worth
presenting here.

English is used as native language by six nations; all the other
countries of the world use it as either a second or a foreign language.
The countries where the British ruled such as India, Sri Lanka and
Pakistan did not dispense English studies even after becoming
independent which resulted in keeping them familiar with English.
They teach English as a second language. All the other countries
which were the European nations and which did not have any
communication familiarity with English in the past, teach English as a
foreign language. Most of the European countries, African, Middle
East and Far East countries come under this category. However, all
the nations of the world have realized the umpteen advantages of
using CALL to expedite English language teaching/learning.
1. Course Materials:

As English is learnt as a global language, one factor becomes significant; when the language is foreign, the content should be native. So, the best idea is that each cultural group prepares its own CALL materials to be offered to their learners. Depending upon the local culture and the linguistic background, and the problems of the learners specific to their group, the materials may be designed. To keep those materials idiomatically and syntactically closer to the native dialect, the material preparers may be trained by the native speakers of English, and the researchers in CALL on the principles of material preparation.

2. Methodology:

The success of any pedagogy depends upon the percentage of increase in the learning abilities of the students. Even if there is uniformity in the proficiency level, the same methodology may not be suitable to all the learners of a group. In order to build a bridge between the proficiency levels of the students, virtual classes/bridge courses may be offered, anticipating all the problems of the slow learners; alternatively, the learners must be trained to achieve the required entry behaviour before they start using the CALL material.
3. Evaluation:

The greatest advantage of using CALL is in the area of evaluation. While continuous assessment is imperative for successful language learning, it becomes hectic for the teacher to correct thousands of test papers periodically; and evaluation is necessary to help the students get the feedback for further improvement. The computer assistance for evaluation provides a great relief to the teacher from correcting thousands of test papers periodically.

4. Bridging rural and urban gap:

Use of common materials to both the urban and rural areas is desirable to placate the disadvantages of living in rural areas. The expenditure incurred on installation of computers and language labs is done once for all. It goes a long way in building the gap between the standard of English teaching in the rural and urban areas.

5. The difference in efficiencies and commitment of the teachers:

CALL solves the problem of inequalities in the efficiencies and commitment of teachers. It is desirable to offer common and uniform training to all the teachers of English to deal with whatever chunk of syllabus they personally deliver in the class.
CALL should be an assistant to the English teacher in India but the teacher should not be made to sub-serve CALL.

6. Global variety:

The expertise of the researchers in ELT from both native and non-native countries can be shared by all the nations of the world if CALL is used for English teaching. At an advanced level, common materials to teach English as a global language, common methodology to assure the success of its delivery, common evaluation pattern to ensure the standard of the learners could be used, if English is taught through CALL.

7. Removes inequalities:

Owing to various inconsistencies in the policy of teaching/learning of English in the States of India, the students may be broadly divided into two categories with reference to their English proficiencies. The first category consists of the students hailing from mostly urban areas who study in the central stream of education and in the state schools through English medium. The other category which consists of the majority of the learners has the students from non English medium background; and’ invariably all of them are weak in English. The sad fact is that they are not only weak in English but are also fully conscious of their weakness. As they advance from high school to college level in education they develop a
strong feeling of diffidence in learning English. They shy away from English classes or remain passive observers when they have to attend the classes. The language lab provides opportunity for these learners to conceal their feelings of inequality as the interaction is mainly between the computer and the learner and not among the peers or the teachers.

In the beginning of the course, the weaker students should be identified and offered a bridge course to meet the expectations of the teacher in the lab sessions. Further, such students should also be paid individual attention in the language labs. Such help along with tutorial sessions can effect building the gap among the linguistic inequalities of the students.

8. Allows the student to take his/her own time and space:

CALL provides immense autonomy to the students, allowing each individual learner to learn according to one’s ability. While it ensures happiness in learning it may also result in wide differences in the amount of learning among the students. Constant watch and personal attention of the tutor/demonstrator in the lab and time bound programs could counter this problems effectively. The teachers/ tutors/ demonstrators who conduct the lab session should be trained intensively for such supervisor-ship in the labs.
9. Soft Skills:

The language teaching at present is not an isolated process as the learners are expected to master in the visual, vocal and verbal skills as well as some other global skills such as interpersonal relationships, time management and leadership qualities. As the other content subjects concentrate on providing information in the target subject, the language teachers have to bear the brunt of training the learners not only in language skills but also in other related soft skills. Language labs are very helpful to inculcate these skills among the learners.

10. Real Life Situations:

Language labs can be effectively used with the help of the multimedia aids for all the possible situations that a student may encounter in the future phase of his life. His success could be measured with three parameters of a) Getting a job b) retaining a job c) progressing in the job. Different situations can be videotaped and shown to the students to improve their assessment power and also their performance.

The teacher has to pay attention to different capabilities of the students and help them strengthen their assets and weaken their shortcomings. After watching a videotape all the students should be asked to improve upon what is shown and do their performance with difference. That would encourage the students
who are endowed with their own creativity and also help the average lot to think in different ways.

Traditionally CALL activities were created for performing in the labs in the presence of a teacher. However, the innovation in tasks prompted the use of skill-based activities with little or no interaction between the teacher and the learner. Since students are not exposed to using self access material as expected by them, the material remains ineffective. Guidance followed by class room sessions help in understanding the usage of multimedia lab and eliminates the ineffectuality of materials. This way of handling the lab sessions would promote better understanding and aids in acquisition of the target language. When students are aware that their participation in the CALL tasks is being tracked and calculated as part of their grade, this would motivate them to perform and further their language learning through CALL. With the increase in the number of learners of English the world over, self access mechanisms have to be made accountable and effective.

Thus, much of the technology’s effectiveness depends of the way a professional chooses to apply the tools to the students’ benefit. Because technology itself does not enhance language learning a teacher/instructor has to be thoroughly aware of the advantages of CALL as a tool before embarking on its implementation in pedagogy.
6.1 The Merits of CALL

- In CALL, multiple materials in multiple formats can all be put on a single computer and can be viewed on the same monitor. Teachers can provide an online transcript, accessible to students freely or only after they have watched or listened to the audio section a specific number of times.

- Well programmed software keeps the learners engaged in the task constantly and consistently by alerting the student towards what is happening on the screen avoiding the hypnotic effect induced when one watches a television or Video.

- Warschauer brings out the advantage of using CAALL material for group discussion. Classroom discussion often tends to have uneven participation where the more articulate students dominate the scene and talk often whereas the diffident students remain silent. The Computer Mediated Communication makes the discussion more or less even as every student has to interact. The discussion on CMC diminishes the effect of individual differences that may hamper communication in the classroom thereby resulting in more comprehensible output produced by those who would otherwise produce little.

- Authenticity: As learners see the connection between CALL tasks and tasks outside the classroom, their motivation is high and their performance in CALL tasks is always on the successful side.
Warschauer, Rasool say that, as the language learners are increasingly preparing for a life of interaction with computers and with other people through computers, their "electronic literacy" becomes an additional target. The authenticity of CALL tasks can be addressed by questioning the extent to which the CALL task affords the opportunity to use the target language in ways that learners will be called upon to do as language users.

Kurzweil predicts that within next 20 years a large portion of communication will take place between humans and computers. Changes that are expected to take place in communication education due to advances in technology are based on, according to him, a model called law of “increasing chaos.” With increasing scientific understanding the “chaos” decreases. A decrease in chaos alternatively facilitates intellectual and scientific progress. English language learners would need communicative competence not only for the events, interlocutors and the media typically covered in the language course books also for interlocutors that may take place through oral and written communication with a computer. Further, Kurzwiel stated that much of the instructional time learners spend will consist of interaction with a computer. In higher education faculty are encouraged to develop online courses. At present the online courses consist of multiple choice questions, multimedia presentation and CMC in chat rooms and discussions but in the future the vision is that such online
courses will include an interface and learning tasks that model interactions with a private home tutor.

- **Computer mediated tasks** can be of two types: Synchronous and Asynchronous.
  - **Synchronous**: Real time communication – the learners might sit in the computer lab during the course period to read and respond to each other’s messages discussing a story that they have read.
  - **Asynchronous**: It allows the learners to hear, speak, read and write electronic messages stored on a server to be produced and accessed anytime so that the process of communication can be spread out across hours, days, weeks and months.
- **Web Publishing**: It can be taken by making students post or publish written or oral work on web. Individual account is not necessary but access to server is necessary.
- **The Web Cams**: These are another channel for live communication which a language teacher could not visualize without the advent of technology.
- **Other meeting sites**: Face book has been a revolutionary invention for the web users to meet faster than on E mail. The other such devices are blogs, twitter, wikis, podcasting, other virtual worlds and interactive white boards. These social networking devices have made the world still smaller and can be very skillfully used to enhance the language learning of the students.
Many CALL routines facilitate prompt and accurate feedback. They demonstrate the time spent on the task by emphasizing that “time plus energy equals learning.”

6.2 Recommendations:

1. The Tasks: There are a variety of language instructor programs in the market, potential developers should first examine the strengths and weaknesses of these products before they start on their own. Efforts will be wasted if the program created mimics another too closely. Goals and objectives should be established before beginning courseware design, funds, staff, time on the project have to be considered. The tasks would be effective when designed on the basis of one lesson for each level and then have it thoroughly reviewed by faculty and students. Hence, the courseware should be clear, comprehensive and completely organized with carefully indicated goals.

The CALL exercises should consist of effective feedback mechanism so that the learners improve their proficiency levels through specific and individualized feedback. The programs have to be transparent because this phenomenon is more advantageous than user friendliness. Transparency is considered to lower the students’ affective filters. The learners’ interest has to be sustained by creating variety of tasks. The exterior elements of the activity such as feel, look, colour, etc of the activity have to be planned carefully as such aspects have to be
inviting and motivate the learner to remain sustained towards the program. In addition, every student should be familiar with the format before beginning the task.

2. The Teachers: Although a given group of instructors might teach the same language at the same level, the experience as well as each individual’s success in teaching the materials will depend on wide variety of circumstances – locality, available resources, maturity level, motivation and receptiveness of the students. The language teachers have to be trained and encouraged to innovate network technologies. Ways and means have to be explored to enable the language teachers to create their own tasks. The teachers need to be allowed to develop and re-conceptualize their own task design mechanisms through a process of continuing in-service programs. Thus, training the teacher candidates in CALL is an essential first step in bridging theory and practice.

The teachers will not be able to fulfill their new role or guide students if they are uncomfortable with the latest technologies and are unable to understand their use and evaluate them properly. Teachers and perspective teachers need a greater appreciation of the communicative interactive elements of teaching. New technologies for language teaching should be the fruit of the collaboration between an expert programmer, a graphic artist and a teacher trained in L2 pedagogy.
The following criteria have to be borne in mind by the educationists who recommend the use of CALL materials and the executioners who make their use compulsory.

1. Access to technology: Newer technologies have to be made available to all the students.
2. Training opportunities should be created and continued for language teachers.
3. Methods should be made easy to reduce the resistance on the part of some students/teachers who prefer more traditional systems of instructional delivery.
4. Recurring costs associated with maintenance, updates and general support should be met with by increasing the government funds for education.

Almost all the nations of the globalized world have realized that it is not possible to live like an island and escape the impact of fast developing technology. So they are now vying with each other to adapt themselves to the changes and make the best use of technology available for every field. It is the rate of literacy of the subjects that decides the enlightenment of the nation. Having realized this every nation is striving to make its citizens educated so that they can enjoy a better participation in the global affairs. It has given a new thrust to the teaching of the global language, English. CALL has come as a boon to the nations which teach English as an SL or an FL as it provides a sound platform for acquiring and enhancing English
language skills. The wide researches and wider communication network CALL has become accessible to all the nations. Creating a global platform for discussions among these nations to enable the design of suitable CALL courses is the need of the hour. Thus technological innovation can profitably be applied to linguistic enhancement by making the two go hand in hand in the pursuit of English language teaching and learning.