

## **COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

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*Abstract: Computer assisted language learning further referred to as CALL has been under the attention of researchers and practitioners in the field of education in the recent years. The technological development in all areas, including in education, calls for new and challenging ways of teaching foreign languages. The modern student is no longer willing to be involved in traditional teaching and therefore, teachers need to adjust and find ways of teaching that promote technology, interaction and communication. The study refers to some materials that can be used in CALL, give instructions on how to create CALL exercises and presents the results of a survey conducted in schools on the importance and usefulness of CALL. We have applied a questionnaire to a sample of 75 students enrolled in 3 high schools and discussed the results.*

*Keywords: CALL, podcast, electronic material, modern methodologies, EFL.*

### **Theoretical background**

Technological development in all areas of our daily lives calls for new approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers can no longer approach the educational process in a traditional manner, ignoring technology because the 21<sup>st</sup> century student lacks motivation in front of the traditional paper and pen education. Apps, blogs, websites, are part of their lives since early childhood. To increase their motivation, teachers have to adjust and sometimes reinvent themselves and their teaching style. The task is not easy, not convenient and sometimes very time consuming. But if we, as teachers want to keep up with the latest trends in education, if we want to achieve something then this is the approach that we need to have towards education.

Nothing can be achieved without motivation. It is the key factor of all achievements. According to Z. Dornyei (Dornyei, 2001), teachers should think of different ways for raising students` motivation. Among the most important ones we consider:

- ✓ Promoting cooperation between learners
- ✓ Promoting group cohesiveness
- ✓ Increasing learner satisfaction
- ✓ Creating a pleasant and supportive atmosphere
- ✓ Providing students with experiences of success
- ✓ Making learning enjoyable by assigning attractive and stimulating tasks.

We believe that CALL activities are a good way to increase students` motivation as they are interactive, challenging and stimulate their attention. According to Klimova (Klimova, 2012: 180-185) the impact of ICT upon learning is important because:

- ✓ Learning becomes more culture conscious
- ✓ It requires critical thinking
- ✓ Learning can happen at any time and any place
- ✓ Learning becomes more personalized
- ✓ Learning is focused on the learner rather than on the teacher.

There are some new key concepts in teaching that influence the teaching process. Among these, the most important ones are:

- ✓ *Student focused teaching*. During this process, the teacher is a co-learner while teachers and students interchange their roles. Vygotsky (1978) states that learning is considered a social process, meaning that that learning occurs when individuals are actively involved in social activities. Constructivism regards each learner as unique and considers the person`s cultural background while nurturing the responsibility and motivation for learning.
- ✓ *Autonomous learning* means helps students develop their own vision upon learning, self-awareness and freedom of discussion.
- ✓ Collaborative and cooperative learning involve students` interaction and therefore promote the development of various skills, especially communication skills. Collaborative learning has a lot of advantages, like preparing students for their future career. Project work is considered among the most useful collaborative learning techniques.
- ✓ *Multilingualism* is another key concept promoted by the education and by the European Union in their lifelong learning programmes. The EU believes that besides knowledge of the students` native language, every EU citizen should speak at least two foreign languages.
- ✓ *Curricula subjects* Students should be taught to use their skills across curricula. The EU promotes the approach called Content and Language Integrated Learning where students use English or a foreign language to study Geography, History, Art, Mathematics or other subjects.

Nowadays, teachers and students can use a variety of resources to make learning more effective and motivating. Current generations have an inborne talent for ICT and we should exploit it (Young, 2003: 447-461). ICT can be integrated through:

- ✓ online courses;
- ✓ Online reference tools;
- ✓ Communication with native speakers via e-mails, Skype, Messenger, blogs, apps;
- ✓ Websites for learning foreign languages.

There is a great variety of computer assisted activities that teachers can create or download from the internet. We shall refer to some of the most common and challenging ones. **Adventure games** are computer guided games that develop the students` critical thinking skills besides the communication and language skills. The student is given a situation that s/he has to face. The player has to choose what s/he wants to do by writing or speaking and the activity continues according to the students` options. The programme is designed in such a way that it gives students feedback. Teachers can create their own adventure games using [halfbakedsoftware.com](http://halfbakedsoftware.com).

**Blogs** are easy to create and use and offer a wide range of classroom and homework activities. In TEFL, blogs can be use for the following tasks:

- ✓ Starting discussions with the students
- ✓ Offering extra materials like audio or video material, pictures
- ✓ Writing activities
- ✓ Online reading material
- ✓ Assessment or self-assessment activities
- ✓ Projects

**Online discussions** are useful when students and teachers are not in the classroom. They can work at home and stay in touch with their classmates. Students can solve tasks together by using apps such as Skype, Messenger, video calls, voice calls. Friends Abroad is an online service that helps

users finding chat partners around the world. It is particularly used by learners of a foreign language who are in search of conversation partners to train their writing and speaking skills.

**Cloze exercises** are similar to fill-in the blank exercises and can be easily created using Hot Potatoes. The same soft can be used to create **Crosswords**. Crosswords are very popular among learners of any age. crossword activities using Hot Potatoes.

**E-folios** are electronic portfolios can be very easily created. They can contain basic activities like essays, worksheets, writing assignments or more complicated tasks like projects. The didactic usefulness of portfolios refers to tracking the students' learning achievements throughout the year. Both teachers and students can evaluate their improvement by giving a look at their assignment. Information collected for a project can be further used for other assignments. Teachers and students can use free software for e-folios for example [www.osportfolio.org](http://www.osportfolio.org).

**Matching activities and multiple choice activities** can take several forms: word, sentence, picture matching. It is a useful activity for all levels as it can start with dragging pictures to words and end up with matching paragraphs. The software Hot Potatoes can be helpful in this case as well.

**Role play** activities are challenging at any age. Students can take up roles and practice their speaking skills as well as develop their critical thinking skills. Role play activities can be performed online with participants from other countries. This activity is known under the name of Multi User Dungeons (MUD). There are also activities that have been especially created for teaching purposes. Teachers can find role play activities and install them on their computers at [moolist.yeehaw.com/edu.html](http://moolist.yeehaw.com/edu.html) or [moo.du.org](http://moo.du.org).

A new and challenging way of learning a foreign language is **Tandem**. Tandem involves native speakers and there is no better way of learning a foreign language than talking to a native speaker. This app turns students into teachers offering language courses to foreigners who in turn teach students a foreign language. For students willing to find Tandem partners, teachers can suggest the following websites: [www2.tcd.ie/CLCS/tandem](http://www2.tcd.ie/CLCS/tandem) or [www.friendsabroad.com](http://www.friendsabroad.com).

**Task based learning** is also useful considering the fact that we no longer teach our students theoretical information but try to develop their competences. Competences can be developed only through involvement in real life situations and such involvement occurs when they are involved in tasks. Teachers can find only tasks to give their students and for further details on such learning can read Michael Svendsen Pedersen's study *What does you have in your "Task" today?*

The last online resource that I want to bring into discussion is **WebQuest**. It has been developed by Bernie Dodge and Tom March with the University of San Diego at the beginning of 1995. WebQuest is an activity where students ask questions and collect information posted on the internet. Teachers provide students with the links and assign them tasks that they have to complete. A shortcoming of this tool is the high level of language used by the website. Apart from this, students are excited to find information on given topics.

### **Research**

The usefulness of CALL seems high at least in theory. The truth is that education cannot remain anchored in the past. The traditional pen and paper, chalk and blackboard education is no longer attractive to the new generation of students. They use technology almost from the moment they are born, therefore education must adjust to the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

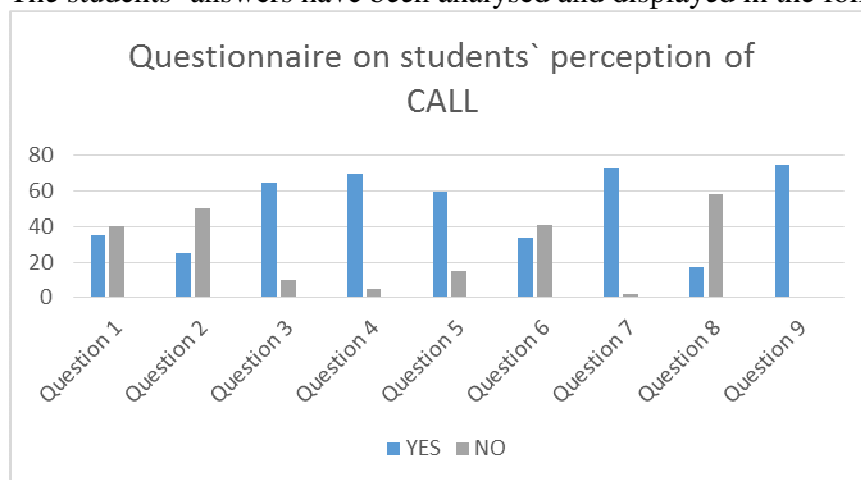
We wanted to see the students' opinion on the usefulness of CALL activities in language teaching and to see whether their teachers use ICT and CALL activities in the classroom. The research was conducted on a sample of 75 students from three high-schools based in Arad. The students were

asked to complete a choice questionnaire with 10 questions. The results were analyzed and presented in this study.

The questionnaire contained the following questions:

	Questions	YES	NO
1.	Do you use computers at schools?	YES	NO
2.	Do your teachers use computer based activities in the classroom?	YES	NO
3.	Do you use the internet for homework or projects?	YES	NO
4.	Do you consider that computer based activities are more interesting than traditional ones?	YES	NO
5.	Do you communicate with native speakers through social webs?	YES	NO
6.	Do teachers use TV, projects PPP in teaching?	YES	NO
7.	Do you use the internet daily?	YES	NO
8.	Have you heard of Webquest or E-folios?	YES	NO
9.	Do you have enough computer skills to use them in learning English?	YES	NO
10.	How often to you think teachers should involve computers in teaching? (state a percentage from the overall teaching activities)		

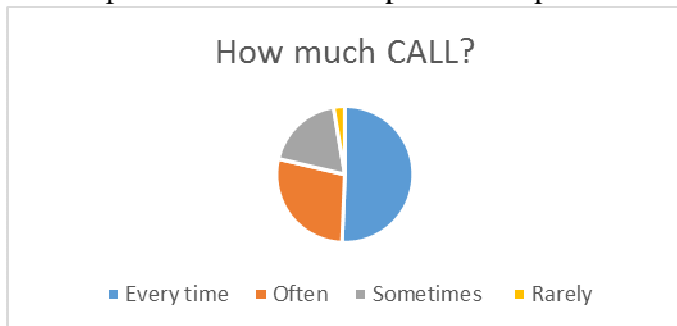
The students` answers have been analysed and displayed in the following chart.



According to the students` answers we can notice that relatively few use computers at school and most probably they use them in computer science classes. Unfortunately, not all schools are properly equipped for computer based education and computers are shared by more classed and students. The answers for Q 2 reveal the fact that few teachers use computers in classroom activities. The reason may be the one stated above or the fact that they consider computer activities less effective than traditional teaching. A further study will be conducted to clear out this issue. The positive aspect revealed by the results of this questionnaire is that almost every student uses the computer for homework or projects. Our students are better anchored in the realities of our society and take advantage of what technology has to offer. Therefore, they consider computer based teaching more challenging and interesting than the traditional one. They have online connections with native speakers, exchange opinions or play computer games. They stated (Q7 and Q8) that internet is an important part of their daily life and that their computer skills help them solve any computer task they get. The answers to Q6 are pretty encouraging, though. Almost one half of the

teachers use TV, PowerPoint Presentations or videos in teaching. And the percentage can be improved with better equipped schools.

Question 10 displays the results of students` perception on the amount of time that should be used for computer activities. The opinions are presented below.



### **Conclusions**

Computer based activities are an important part of the educational process. We, as teachers should be aware of the impact technology has on our learners. If we want to keep them focused and engaged in learning, our teaching style must change. CALL and ICT offer a wide range of activities and tasks that are highly appreciated by students. They develop many skills and most of all, they develop their competences. Current education is a competence based type of education. We should leave aside the old-fashion view upon education and understand that competence is the key to good professionalism. We train and educate good professionals with high competences in their future field of study. Technology and foreign languages are part of the future. They should go hand in hand in a teacher`s classroom especially if s/he teaches English.

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