Iranian EAP Practitioners’ Attitudes toward and Familiarity with CALL: A Case at Guilan University

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Abstract
In recent years, the field of foreign language teaching and learning has witnessed increasing interest in the use of computer in education. Among various factors affecting the successful implementation of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in the educational contexts, teachers’ attitudes and familiarity with CALL plays indispensable role. Hence, the present study tried to shed some light on these issues and reveal potential barriers for such implementations. To this aim, a questionnaire and a semi–structured interview were developed for the 20 EAP practitioners at Guilan University in Iran. The results indicated that, in general, there were positive attitudes regarding computer technology but the practitioners’ familiarity with the technology was a bit unsatisfactory. Moreover, some problems on CALL implementation were identified and possible solutions were suggested. One of the principal problems detected was the inadequacy of teacher training programs in Iran. It was suggested that implementing CALL successfully not only requires a paradigm shift in the teacher training programs but also demands the incorporation of policy makers and the governors for such implementation.

Keywords: CALL, computer familiarity, EAP, attitudes, computer technology

1. Introduction
Since the advent of computer technology, the field of language teaching and learning has always been preoccupied with its application in educational context. This, however, has brought new challenges for the stakeholders in the educational system in implementing Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) since this new and innovative approach, which is based on the latest advances in computer and Internet technology, has replaced more traditional ones, hence posing some threat to well-established comfort domains of the teachers. Like other innovation, teachers initially resist against implementing computers in their practices. The term “computer-phobia” and “computer anxiety” (Wood, Muller, Laurier, Willoughby, Specht, & Deyoung (2005, p. 185) were coined and entered in the literature for the teachers’ resistance to computer use. According to Ademola (2009), due to lack of training and experience, teachers rarely use computers in their educational practice even when they are available. Lewis (2009) observed that while technology appears to offer attractive learning opportunities to teachers and learners, it is not an end for itself; teachers and learners should manage, not be managed by technology.

“Regardless of successive educational reforms and curriculum changes, teachers’ attitudes and beliefs remain the single strongest guiding influence on instruction” (Gorsuch 2000, p. 678). In his meta-analysis of the factors for promoting the use of computer aided learning, Griffin (1988) contended that teacher attitude on computers is an important factor related to the teacher’s role towards the effective use of computers in education. The use of computers in education would, to large extent, depend on how well teachers integrate them in everyday activities. And therefore, the question of teacher attitude toward computers is central to any successful use of computers in education. The notion of the familiarity of teachers with the new advancement in technology, especially computer technology for education, has long been discussed by the scholars. Chapelle and Hegelheimer (2004) recognize the need for teachers to be familiar with a variety of information regarding basic computer hardware, software, and lab operation in order to make informed decisions regarding CALL use. Meanwhile, Warschauer (2002) identifies four types of electronic literacies which teachers should possess:

- **Computer literacy** (i.e. comfort and fluency in keyboarding and using computers);
- **information literacy** (i.e. the ability to find and critically evaluate online information);
- **multimedia literacy** (i.e. images and sounds); and
- **computer-mediated communication literacy** (i.e. knowledge of the pragmatics of individual and group online interaction). (p. 45)
In addition, according to Hubbard and Levy (2006), practitioners are required to become more proficient in their understanding of CALL methodology, practices, history and possibilities. They, also, contend that the opportunities for teachers to experiment with technology, both new and old, to interact with their colleagues and to access other sources of information on technology should be maximized in teacher training courses. Hall (2011) argues since the computer technology continuously faces rapid changes, its incumbent upon practitioners to familiarize themselves with such advancements. Such familiarity, in fact, empowers practitioners to act autonomously, accordingly the "practicality parameter" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.59) can be well operationalized in the educational environment, especially in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context.

2. Literature Review

CALL has been seen through different lenses (Warschauer & Healey, 1998; Bax, 2003; Lamy & Hampel, 2007, just a few to name). It has been defined as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p.1). According to Warschauer and Healey (1998, p.57), computers have been used in language instruction since the 1960s, and CALL has shifted through three stages: "Behavioristic CALL", "Communicative CALL", and "Integrative CALL". Although Bax (2003) and Jung (2005) warn against taking the three-phase timeline proposed by Warschauer and Healey (1998) too literally, it does provide plausible reference points (Lamy & Hampel, 2007).

Behavioristic CALL: 1960s-1970s; technology served as a "tutor" providing necessary programs for teaching grammar, vocabulary and translation. In such perspective, little interaction between machine and learner could be established and all learning process was controlled by computer.

Communicative CALL: late 1970s-early 1980s; the technology functioned as a tool for facilitating learner and computer interactions. New programs were developed to enhance communication; technology encouraged learners to use language and learn language forms implicitly rather than explicitly through computer-based activities; simulations were a huge part of Communicative CALL because they encouraged discussion.

Integrative CALL: late 1980s-early 1990s; emphasizing the use of language in authentic social contexts. In such view, technology works as a medium facilitating learner-learner interaction. The Internet applications are based on this perspective. Teachers wanted to make technology more central; more social or socio-cognitive views were embraced.

Bax (2003, p. 20) approaches CALL through "Restricted/non-restricted" application of CALL in language pedagogy. According to him, CALL was first used in a restricted manner in pedagogy with the role as being restricted to monitoring, or the feedback restricted to closed responses and so on. In open CALL, he sees CALL as relatively open in all dimensions—from the feedback given to students, to the software types, to the role of the teacher. In the third approach, an Integrated CALL the use of CALL becomes normalized in every aspects of pedagogy, integrated into syllabus, and adapted to learners’ needs. This is actually the phase which we aim to and does not yet exist to any significant degree. Bax believes that at this moment in the historical development of CALL we are still in open CALL, our aim being to move towards Integrated CALL in future.

Meanwhile, Lamy and Hampel (2007) utilized SLA research as a basis for investigating CALL. Two learning theories, namely the cognitive and sociocultural frameworks, were called for learning teaching online, as they maintain:

Within the cognitive paradigm (which emerged first), language learning is seen as internalized – focusing on the processes within an individual’s mind that can contribute to language development and on activities that help to stimulate these processes. In contrast, sociocultural theorists think of language as contextualized and see language learning as an interpersonal process situated in a social and cultural context and mediated by it. (p.19)

2.1 CALL Studies in Iran

In Iran, the literature on the use of Computer Technology in the educational context, especially in the EAP environment, is scanty. Askari Arani (2004) studied the effect of Information and Communication Technology - based teaching method on medical students' English for specific purposes learning. The findings revealed that students’ performance on internet-based medical English articles was better than that in the traditional text-based method. Yaghoubi, Malekmohammadi, Iravani, Attaran and Gheidi (2008), for example, examined perception of virtual students’ attitudes towards e-learning in Iran. The data for this study were based on students’ experiences taking an Online Learning Course offered by the University of Technology, Iran University of Science and Technology (IUST), and Shiraz University through their websites. The results showed that students had positive perception to e-learning. Ataran and Nami (2011) examined the factors that influenced public school teachers’ technology acceptance decision making by using a research model, namely Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to trace the impact of external variables on internal beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Participants in study were 224 teachers who were enrolled a teacher training program in Iran. The study indicated that the job relevance and education have substantial influence on the teachers’ technology acceptance. Khanifar, Bordbar, Seraji, Ismaeily, NikAeen, and Atayi (2012) in addition to reviewing the existing approaches and their positive and useful effects and the role of technology in education, analyzed components such as knowledge, quantity, quality, and easiness. The results showed that there was significant positive relationship between access to technology and teachers' satisfaction and success. Maftoon and Shahini (2012) examined various factors that may have influenced the uptake of CALL resulting in disuse and discouragement. Fifty Iranian in-service teachers filled out a questionnaire on the sources of CALL use discouragement. The results indicated a comparative...
Yaghmaei, Schiffauerova, and Yaghmaei (2012) developed a scale for the assessment of the attitude toward computer in the Iranian context, and validated the content and face of the scale. The results of the validity tests showed that the developed scale was valid for the use in the Iranian context. Fardy, NooriShorabi, and Mohammadi (2012) aimed to explore the effect of CALL on the reading comprehension of narrative texts of Iranian male freshmen. The results showed the positive effect of CALL on the reading comprehension of narrative texts. Dashtestani (2012) explored the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward the use of CALL in EFL courses as well as their perceptions of possible barriers to the implementation of CALL. The findings indicated that Iranian EFL teachers hold positive attitudes toward the use of CALL. The study further reported several serious barriers to the application and inclusion of CALL in Iranian EFL courses. In the same vein, Rahimi and Yadollahi (2012) investigated Iranian female students' attitude towards CALL and its relationship with their level of education, computer ownership, and frequency of use. The findings revealed that the participants had a general positive attitude towards CALL. Talebinezhad, and Azizi Abarghoui (2013) attempted to investigate the Iranian high school students' attitude toward CALL and the use of CALL for EFL receptive skills. Their findings demonstrated that most of the students had positive attitudes towards CALL and using it in language receptive skills teaching. Finally, Atai and Dashtestani (2013) investigated the participants' attitudes toward the Internet in EAP courses for undergraduate students of civil engineering (CE) in Iran. The analysis of the data revealed that the majority of EAP instructors, CE instructors and undergraduate students had positive attitudes toward the Internet. However, the results showed that EAP instructors do not make use of any types of Internet-based activities in their classes. Moreover, the majority of limitations in using the Internet in EAP courses were identified.

In the literature reviewed in Iranian context, most studies have taken a techno-centric approach to CALL. CALL has been seen as a treatment applied to learners and the effect of treatment on learning has been measured. In other words, they have focused on the effectiveness of the medium itself rather than the attributes of the learners and other agencies like teachers involved in such contexts. For evaluating CALL efficiency, broader social factors and their affinances should be taken into account; just focusing on a particular gain attributed to the technology itself would not be sufficient. Whereas many reviewed researches have shed light on the CALL in Iranian EAP programs, few have targeted the familiarity of the EAP practitioners with computer technology. As it was pinpointed one of the important issues in successful implementation of CALL is the teachers' familiarity and attitudes with the computer programs and soft wares and other technological advancements in educational context. Hence, the present study is an attempt to take into account Iranian EAP practitioners' attitudes toward and familiarity with CALL and elaborates the problems in its successful implementation in such programs in Iran, where English is mainly used for academic purposes and EAP plays a highly important role. Accordingly, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are Guilan University EAP practitioners' views and attitudes toward the usefulness of CALL in EAP programs?
2. How familiar are Guilan University EAP practitioners with CALL as indicated by their responses to the questionnaire?
3. What are the dilemmas in implementing CALL in Guilan University EAP programs?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study were all available EAP practitioners at Guilan University, in the north of Iran, in the academic year 2012-2013. Both male and female faculty members (n=12) as well as several visiting professors from other universities in Guilan (n=8) participated in this study. Most of them had a several-year experience of teaching EAP in different universities; their ages ranged from 33 to 65.

3.2 Instrument

Two instruments were developed by the researchers to achieve the purpose of the present study: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire in Likert scale format with five levels (40 items) (see Appendix) comprised two sections: the first section (23 items) dealt with the perceptions of the practitioners of CALL while the second part (17 items) centered on the familiarity of them with the CALL. The content of the questionnaire was determined on the basis of the review of literature and some existing questionnaires adapted to the research questions of the study. There was a panel discussion on the items of the questionnaires; five EAP experts from Guilan University estimated the appropriateness and coverage of the content as well as the format and its face on a Likert scale. Once the defective items (3 items) were deleted, good correlation index among judges was obtained (r=.83). The defective components/ items were repaired once again and the final revision conducted. The reliability index (Cronbach's alpha) of the two sections of the questionnaire was satisfactory (.75 and .73). The second instrument employed was a semi-structured interview comprising one question with the EAP practitioners (5 participants) addressing the dilemmas in implementing CALL in Iranian EAP context. The participants were interviewed orally in English by the researcher and they were tape-recorded. Each interview lasted about five minutes.
3.3 Procedure
To answer the first and second research questions, the percentage of the participants’ preferences on the questionnaires developed in the Likert scale was determined. For the third question, the respondents’ common answers on dilemmas of implementing CALL in Iranian EAP programs were identified and the participants’ preferences were determined.

4. Results
The data obtained from the interview was subjected to descriptive analysis; the respondents’ common answers were identified and the percentages of the participants’ preferences were determined.

4.1 Practitioners’ Perception of CALL
Table 1 displays the participants’ responses to the first section of the questionnaire. The first item dealt with practitioners’ perception regarding the efficiency of computer technology in teaching and research in general. More than 90% of the respondents agreed upon the issue. The second item centered on the effectiveness of computer technology on practitioners’ knowledge and skills. About 75% stated their agreement on it. The third item questioned the effectiveness of CALL in comparison with more traditional approaches. About 80% had such perception. The fifth item, the interaction opportunity provided by CALL, also had similar answers; about 60% agreed. The sixth item, the role of CALL in manipulating instructional materials elicited 80% agreement. The seventh item, the spread of knowledge via computer had got 100% agreement. 70% agreed on the eighth item, the effectiveness of CALL in EAP context. 75% agreed on the ninth item: the role of social networks for authentic communication. The tenth item probed the importance of CALL for designing curriculum which elicited about 65% agreement. Regarding the eleventh item, avoiding handwriting and organizing ideas, again 65% expressed their consensus.

Table 1. EAP practitioners’ attitude toward CALL (frequency and percentage)

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SD: strongly disagree  D: disagree  U: undecided  A: agree  SA: strongly agree

The twelfth item sought practitioners’ perceptions of their information regarding educational softwares. Only 35% stated that they had satisfactory information. Regarding the role of the World Wide Web in teaching and learning, the thirteenth item, 60% had positive attitudes. About the fourteenth item, self-access learning environment by CALL, 75% had general agreements. 70% agreed that computer could provide a chance for individual learners’ abilities, hence item 15. The sixteenth item, computer can help track of student progress, elicited 75% of agreements. The seventeenth item probed the function of computer in targeting students’ needs, preferences, and learning tactics. 85% agreed upon it. 75%
had a consensus that computer enabled them for more interest and creative work- the eighteenth item. The nineteenth item, "I myself can learn almost everything about how to use a computer" had only 40% agreement. In the same vein, only 45% agreed upon the twentieth item- the ability to solve the computer problems alone. With regard to the item 21, "when I use a computer, I don't have the entire control on it", 55% agreed upon. 70% of respondents stated that they did not need any one to tell them the best way to a computer-item 22. And finally, about 70% of practitioners stated that they had limited experience in using computer technology for their EAP programs, i.e. item 23.

4.2 Practitioners’ Familiarity with CALL

In the second part of the questionnaire, the respondents expressed their degrees of familiarity with CALL (Table 2). With regard to word processors, item 24, about 90% had average and good familiarity. Around 75% had average or good familiarity with the SPSS (item 25). Concerning presentation programs like Power Point (item 26) about 80% had average or good familiarity. For item 27, the social networks, 75% stated that they had rather average or good familiarity. But only 30% expressed their good or average familiarity with pronunciation programs (item 28) and about 70% expressed their poor familiarity on such programs. In the same token, For items 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40 (vocabulary programs, drills program like TOEFL Mastery, language learning software, the concordance programs, the writing tools, the listening programs, the reading tools, the online recording software and the course management software respectively) the same poor familiarity was reported (about 75% low familiarity). But for e-book readers like Amazon Kindle (item 33) a change was detected: about 55% expressed their rather average familiarity with the tool. Finally, for item 34, the e-tools like podcasts, Skype, wikis…, about 50% expressed average or good familiarity and the other 50% demonstrated their low familiarity.

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Table 2. Familiarity of EAP Practitioners with CALL (Frequency and Percentage)

4.3 The Dilemmas in Implementing CALL

The respondents’ common answers on dilemmas of implementing CALL in Iranian EAP programs were identified and the participants’ preferences were determined as follows. The majority of respondents (about 75 %) stated that the most important problem is the computer illiteracy of the practitioners and the students; most of them, in fact, are claimed not to be familiar with the ABCs of computer. Accordingly, the respondents postulated that the inefficiency of the teacher training programs for training computer literate teachers give rise to such problems. Social issues, especially the negative attitudes of the stakeholders regarding CALL, constituted another dilemma. The practical concerns such as the availability of such technology in the educational context were another issue of concern. Some also reported on ‘technophobia’ or computer anxiety most teachers possess.

5. Discussion

From the data obtained (questionnaire -part one), it can be induced that the EAP practitioners, in general, have positive attitudes toward CALL. These findings corroborate with Talebinezhad and Azizi Abarghoui (2013), Atai and Dashtestani (2013), Bordbar (2010), Rahimi and Yadollahi (2012), Dashtestani (2012), Park and Son (2009), Yashau (2006) and Wood et al. (2005). Positive attitudes of teachers and learners can give rise to a more successful
implementation of CALL in Iranian educational context. This indicates that the perception of the practitioners toward computer technology is more of a positive tool that can enhance teaching and learning process. However, the positive attitude may be a necessary condition for successful implementation of CALL but certainly not sufficient.

The findings of the study do not support the idea that teachers' attitudes toward computer technologies are related to teachers' computer competence as Pourhosein Gilakjani and Leong (2012) have stated. As the results reveal, the practitioners have difficulty in operationalizing their positive perception into practice, and especially when it comes to the familiarity of practitioners with the computer technology, a drastic change occurs. In other words, although the study illustrated that there were positive attitudes among Iranian EAP practitioners toward CALL, their low familiarity with computer technology makes us think more thoroughly about its causes and possible solutions. As it was demonstrated in the interview, one of the principal problems is the inadequacy of teacher training programs in Iran. With other barriers to the implementation of CALL in Iranian EAP courses, the same root can be traced.

In sum, the results of the present study are commensurate with the previous studies (Wood et al, 2005; Atai & Dashtestani, 2013; Maftoon & Shahini, 2012; and Dashtestani, 2012) which propose lack of facilities, inadequate teaching training programs, and teachers' computer illiteracy as the major barriers in implementing CALL in Iranian EAP context. Moreover, the study revealed that technophobia of practitioners (Wood, et al., 2005) was another issue to be taken into account.

As mentioned earlier, in teacher education, the teachers should be introduced with new technology and they need education directly focused on technology for language education (Chapelle, 2003). In teacher education, both technical and pedagogical training is needed. As it was found in the study, the majority of the EAP practitioners knew little about different educational softwares and e-tools. What seems inevitable is that teacher training programs in Iran help teachers gain such literacy in CALL. As Hubbard & Levy (2006) truly postulate, teacher training objectives should demystify CALL. They should help teachers overcome their fears of computers and enhance teachers' existing computer skills, and encourage them to explore the sources already available and build teachers' confidence in using available sources. With such rapid changes in computer technology, specifically with respect to Internet and web-based applications, "prior experience and success with this innovation are necessary for teachers to develop a sense of self-efficacy and a feeling of mastery before they are comfortable integrating this technology within their teaching" (Wood et al, 2005, p.202). CALL education as a whole should have a wider mission, to prepare not only classroom teachers but also others that are involved in the integration of technology.

6. Conclusion

The study probed Guilan EAP practitioners' degree of familiarity with CALL and shed some light on their attitudes regarding CALL. It also demonstrated some potential barriers in CALL implementation through the lenses of the EAP practitioners and some possible solutions were proposed. In general, concerning the attitudes of practitioners, the whole picture depicted was positive. But little familiarity of the practitioners with CALL cautions us to reshape the existing teacher training programs in Iran. Like any innovation in education, CALL may impose some threats to a well-established traditional pedagogical context to which it's introduced. According to Ellis (2001), some factors determine the acceptance of such innovations: the sociocultural context of innovation, the personality and skill of teachers, the method of implementation, and attributes of the proposal themselves. Implementing CALL successfully not only requires a paradigm shift in the teacher training programs but also demands the policy makers and the governors to provide the budget necessary for such implementation. And as Hubbard and Levy (2006) truly put forward, in order to have proper integration of technology in the educational context, our teacher education programs must utilize a strong technology component to properly prepare future teachers for this integration. A one-course approach is not sufficient to give the competencies as well as the confidence needed to fully integrate technology.

References


Appendix

The Questionnaire for EAP Practitioners

Dear professor,

Please circle one of the numbers from 1 to 5 according to your perceptions of each item on the use of computer technology in EAP program


1. In my view, computer technologies are more powerful tools of teaching and research than more traditional tools:

   1 2 3 4 5

2. ALL computer technologies (referring generally to computers, videos, hardware, software, and networks) increase my knowledge and skills as a university teacher:

3. Computer is a more powerful tool than discussions and lectures without the use of CALL.

4. Computer programs can be used as advanced instructional tools in higher education.

5. Internet can provide face-to-face intimate interactions between teachers and learners.

6. Computer can be used to effectively manipulate instructional contents and materials.

7. I know that computer can spread knowledge and information faster than traditional methods.

8. Computer is more effective for teaching and learning in EAP than printed materials.

9. I think social networks can provide authentic communications among individuals.

10. In my view computer can be used for curriculum materials in higher education.

11. I can avoid problems like handwriting and organizing ideas when I use computer.

12. I have enough and satisfactory information about educational soft wares.

13. The World Wide Web and Internet provide me the best chance to teach and learn.

14. I can use computer to provide a student self-access and learning environment.

15. Computer can provide a chance for individual student’s ability and learning pace.

16. Computer can help keep track of student progress.

17. Computer can provide a student individual needs, preference and learning tactics.

18. Computers enable me for more interest and creative work.

19. I myself can learn almost everything about how to use a computer.

20. If I meet some problems in using a computer, I can probably solve by myself.

21. When I use a computer, I do not have the entire control over it.

22. I do not need anyone to tell me the best way to a computer.

23. I have limited experiences in using computer technology for my EAP courses.

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Level of familiarity (1. Very poor  2. poor   3. average  4. good   5. excellent)

24. The word processors like MS Word, Latex:

25. The statistical packages like SPSS, Excel:

26. The presentation programs like PowerPoint:

27. The social net workings like Facebook, etc. :

28. The English pronunciation programs, such as 'American Accent Program' :

29. Vocabulary programs, such as 'Synonyms', 'English Vocabulary', 'Practice Makes Perfect'

30. The drill and practice programs like 'TOEFL Mastery', Accelerated English :

31. The language learning soft wares like "Learn to speak English"

32. The concordance program such as "Oxford's Micro Concord" :

33. The e – book reader soft wares like Amazon Kindle:

34. The e – tools like Podcasts, vod casts, audio blogs, Skype , Wikis, e- groups:

35. The writing tools like 'Write board', 'Google documents':

36. The listening programs like 'Listen!', 'TOEFL Mastery', 'Accelerated English'

37. The reading tools and games like 'Reading Adventure 1 – ESL', 'Reading Critically', 'Steps to Comprehension', 'Hang Word' :

38. The online recording software like k7. net:

39. The course management soft wares like Blackboard, , Web CT, Moodle:

40. User- friendly soft wares like Hot Potatoes:

Interview Question

In your opinion, what are the dilemmas in implementing CALL in Iranian EAP courses?

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