

Attitudes of EFL Teachers and Learners towards CALL in Turkey

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Abstract

Technological developments in every field resulted in the advancement of instructional technology, as well. Due to these improvements, the number of research studies carried out on computer usage and education increased. Foreign language education and technology use is one the research fields that is continuously growing. Although there are a number of studies investigating the effective use of computer assisted language teaching, there awaits some vital questions to be answered. By focusing on a specific context of CALL, this study tries to investigate the attitudes of teachers' and students' towards computer integration in language teaching and learning. Within the scope of this review, ten studies will be investigated. The studies are carried out in Turkey, addressing some of the issues related with CALL. The participants are teachers and students from different educational settings. The main topics discussed are the educational value attributed to CALL, perceived problems hindering the implementation process and suggestions on how these problems can be solved.

Keywords: attitudes, CALL, English Language Teaching, technology.

1. Introduction

Foreign language teaching and learning depend on a number of factors such as appropriate use of educational materials, teachers, students, and administration. With the developments of educational tools, language teachers and learners are trying new ways to integrate technology into their teaching and learning processes. Since not many of the technological advancements are useful for language learning and teaching purposes, the students and the instructors need to be selective. Over the past decade, computer assisted language learning (CALL), by providing teachers and students a theory to follow, have become one of the major research fields in ELT. The new era of technology requires both students and teachers to be more motivated to use computers during language learning and teaching process. The teachers need to be skillful in computer usage and also need to possess knowledge of how to integrate technology into English teaching (Li, G., & Ni, X., 2011). The results of the study indicate that most of the teachers use computers primarily for teacher-centered activities. Another study, Bordbar, F. (2010), argues the importance of the computers in teacher education. Information and communication technologies offer a high number of opportunities for language education as well as equip students with practice that will lead to a wider development on national basis. Kuo, M. (2008) addresses the issue by arguing that although CALL is a popular trend in ELT today; the implementation of CALL is still problematic. Using computers is not a methodology; rather it is a medium that can be integrated into methodological practice. The implication of the study is that the computer skills course as well as a course on how to integrate computers in to language teaching could be an important part of language teacher education. Although many of the schools in Turkey today are equipped with computers, most of the teachers hesitate to use them for educational purposes due to insufficient computer skills (Gulbahar, Y. 2005).

As argued above, although there have been various developments in the technology, use of technological tools in teaching and specifically language teaching is rather underdeveloped due to some problems. The implications of computers for language learning can be viewed differently by teachers and students. Hence, it would be beneficial to assess and review both the instructors' and the learners' attitudes. Although there are many studies conducted about attitudes towards CALL in different countries, the number of the studies carried out in Turkey is very limited. Making use of the available literature in Turkey would be beneficial for the future research studies as well.

The questions to be answered in this study are as follows: **1)** Do the teachers and students have negative or positive attitudes towards the use of CALL? **2)** Do the teachers and the students attribute any educational value to CALL? **3)** How confident are the teachers and students in using CALL? **4)** What are the perceived main problems hindering teachers from using ICT for language teaching purposes? **5)** What are some perceived problems for using technology for language learning purposes? **6)** How can these problems be solved?

2. Scope and aim

This study aims to investigate some points related with the attitudes of English language learners and teachers towards computer assisted language learning (in Turkey). One of the points is that the schools are not equipped well enough to make CALL as beneficial as possible. Another one is the fact that not all the language teachers are familiar with the technology and not all the familiar ones know how to use it for language teaching purposes. Due to limited number of available studies in the subject area and context, the review will not focus on a specific aspect of computer usage such as internet usage or a specific type of software usage. In this sense, the study examines the attitudes towards CALL in a broader sense. The studies provide information about attitudes of teachers and students in university level, secondary education level, and primary education level as well. Within the scope of this review, ten studies will be investigated. These studies are focusing on attitudes of pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as students. The studies investigate not only the attitudes but also the motivation and perceptions related with CALL, as well. Analyzing the selecting studies, the review compares and contrasts the teachers' and the students' attitudes. The study tries to investigate the attitudes of teachers and students in relation with **a)** perceived competency level of their computer skills, **b)** perceived barriers, and **c)** educational value attributed to computer usage in language learning. Since the study aims to compare and contrast the attitudes of teachers and students, the topics to be discovered are the ones stated above. By comparing the teachers' and students' attitudes towards CALL, this study aims to address some of the underlying problems of implementation of CALL in Turkey. Hopefully, this review of literature will help to solve the problems related with computer usage in language classes.

3. Methodology

After the initial searching procedure it is found that there a number of studies conducted on attitudes towards computer usage in teaching; however, not many of them focused on language teaching in particular. For this reason, among many others, the studies concerning primarily language teaching context were selected. As a second criterion, the studies conducted in Turkey were taken into the consideration. Application of this criterion resulted in fewer studies. Since the number of the studies was limited to ten, there were no specific criteria for the selection of journals. Though no criteria consideration took place in the journal selection process, the articles available were published in respected journals such as *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* (focuses on conference proceedings), and *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education* (refereed). To be thorough in the selection process, some unpublished thesis studies from various universities were also taken into consideration.

4. Results and discussion

The selected studies used qualitative and quantitative methods in general. One study made use of only interviews and observations (Top, 2007). Overall, there are 777 English teachers from college, secondary school, and primary school levels. 457 of them are pre-service teachers while 320 of them are in-service teachers. There are also 17 administrators from high school level (Top, 2007). In total there are 270 students who participated in the selected studies. The selected studies are recently published; the oldest study is published in 2005. Since the technological field and the literature related change rapidly, it is important to review recent literature. Out of ten studies six of them focus on teachers' attitudes while two of them focus on students' attitudes. The other two studies examine the issue both from teachers' perspective and from students' perspectives. Although the number of studies is limited, the studies provide rich information about the current state of CALL in Turkey. The results and discussion are presented under four categories. Each category then divided into two subcategories focusing on teachers and students separately.

4.1. Attitudes

All the studies reviewed indicate that the teachers and the students have positive attitudes towards instructional technology in English language teaching and learning. In order to determine attitudes, the studies made use of Likert scale questionnaires and interviews. The total number of participants is important for generalizing the results.

4.1.1 Attitudes of Teachers

The teachers' having a positive attitude towards CALL was common in all of the eight studies that focus on teachers. Although there are some differences in terms of tools used by these studies, they

all indicate that majority of the teachers have positive opinions and feelings towards CALL. Yuksel and Kavanoz (2011) conducted their study on 200 pre-service teachers and found that 66.5% had highly positive and 30.5% had slightly positive attitudes. By administering a 5 point Likert scale questionnaire to 30 in-service teachers, Hismanoğlu (2010) found that the teachers had positive attitudes (mean score 4,2). The study carried out by Kulekci (2009) indicates that about 90% of the teachers have positive attitudes. An unpublished thesis by Top (2007) made use of observations and interviews in order to determine the teachers' attitudes. The study had 17 in-service teachers and 17 administrators as participants. Teachers indicated that they try to use technology and they feel positive about the benefits of ICT on ELT. Having 87 in-service teachers, Karakaya (2010) found that the majority of the teachers have positive attitudes towards CALL. The study used ICT scale and did frequency analysis to reach a conclusion. 87% of the participants think that they are comfortable with using ICT for language teaching purposes. Akcaoglu (2008) had 67 pre-service and 120 in service teachers in his study. The study used 5 point Likert scale questionnaire and the results suggest that the teacher have positive attitudes (mean 4.10). Aykac (2005) used a questionnaire to determine the attitudes of 60 EFL teachers. The positive attitude of the teachers was indicated by the mean scores ranging between 3.96 and 4.50. Lastly, Dokur (2008) interviewed 6 in-service teachers and found that they had positive attitudes towards the specific software used in the study.

4.1.2 Attitudes of Students

There are four studies focusing on the attitudes of the students. Although the students seem to be rather passive making classroom decisions on using ICT for language technologies, learning about their attitudes is highly important. Simsek (2008) carried out a study investigating the students' attitudes. The participants of the study were 30 college level students. The tool used was a questionnaire. The results indicate that the participants have positive attitudes towards CALL (mean 70.71 out of 95). Tuncok (2010) suggests that 64.1% of 120 students want to learn English with computers. The study also suggests that the participants who have CALL experience have more positive attitudes to CALL than those who are not familiar with it. Aykac (2005) administered a questionnaire on the attitudes towards voice chat with 20 students and found that 85% of the participants have positive attitudes. Finally, by making use of a questionnaire on WordBird software, Dokur (2008) found that 78% of 100 students have positive attitudes towards the software.

4.2. Educational Value Attributed

One of the reasons that lead teachers to use CALL in their classrooms is the educational value they attribute to it. In other words, if the teachers are aware of the advantages of using CALL in their classrooms than they are more likely to use it. The same is valid for the students as well. Since the students are actively involved during CALL activities, they, too, should be aware of the benefits and advantages of using computers.

4.2.1 Educational Value Attributed by the Teachers

The qualitative data tools used by the studies provide us with rich insight about the beliefs of teachers in relation with the benefits of using computers in language teaching process. Out of eight studies that focus on teachers, six give details on what educational value the teachers attribute to CALL. The interview data hold significant details and explains how the teachers view computers as educational tools. All of the six studies indicate that teachers believe that computers enhance teaching English language and leads long term learning. Five of the studies suggest that using computers are interesting and enjoyable. 4 of the studies see computers a way of improving speaking skills, while half of the studies state that it is a good practice for improving listening skills. Furthermore, three of the studies indicate that computers gather the attention of the students, improve the quality of the lesson, minimize the burden of the teacher, and save time. Two of the studies suggest that CALL provides alternative drills and visual help. Only one of the studies indicates that using computers "promote analytical, creative, higher order thinking skills" (Kulekci, 2009). Furthermore, Top (2007) suggests that CALL practice addresses "the diverse needs of the students".

4.2.2 Educational Value Attributed by the Students

The students have beliefs about the value of computers in language learning process, as well. Dokur (2008) suggests that 76% of the participants think that WordBird helps them to improve their English. The students also think that it helps them to learn vocabulary and improve their speaking, as well. Tuncok (2010) states that the students think they feel more comfortable in front of computers than they do in face-to-face communication. The data gathered from the questionnaire shows that 71.6% of

the participants think they improve their vocabulary knowledge through CALL. 63% of the participants also think that CALL practice improves their listening skills, while 55.9% think that they improve their speaking skills via CALL. Another significant result is that 58% of the students believe that their reading skills are improved through CALL which is different from the attributions of the teachers. Improvement of reading skills is also mentioned in Simsek (2008). The data collected through interviews show that the students think they can improve their reading skills via CALL. Furthermore, the participants said that CALL enables them to learn at their own pace and gives them more flexibility. The students also feel that they are encouraged to learn more thanks to CALL practices.

4.3. Problems

The literature suggests that having positive thoughts about computers does not actually mean that the teachers are implementing computers efficiently to meet the language teaching goals (Kulekci, 2009). The lack of teachers' competency and confidence in using computers is one of the main problems.

4.3.1 Problems of Teachers

The data acquired through interviews reveal some precious information about the problems of implementing CALL. Out of the studies focusing on the teachers, seven provide information about the problems. The teachers' perceived competency and confidence level, lack of technological equipment in the learning environment, and incompatible curriculum design are the primary problems stated in the studies. Interestingly, two of the studies indicate that computers distract the students' attention. Although, as argued in the previous section, three of the studies stated that computers attract the students' attention, these two studies state that the teachers are hesitant to use computers because they think that the computers create a problem of distracting attention. Another interesting point is the fact that, as three of the studies state, computers consume time and energy. This again is in contrast with the findings discussed in the previous section. Considering that the number of studies on each side is equal, I would say that more research should be conducted before reaching to any kind of conclusion. As for the administrators' point of view Top (2007) suggests that majority of the administrators are positive about using computers and want teachers to use the available resources. However, teachers argue against them by saying that although they seem very enthusiastic about computer use, they are not really supportive in terms of providing the teachers with opportunities.

4.3.2 Problems of Students

Students have some problems in relation with computer usage in language learning process, although they have positive attitudes towards it. Three studies out of four give details about the students' problems. Simsek (2008), by interviewing some students after engaging them with partially online reading course, found that some students have problems with online reading process. Since the students are not able to touch and "scratch" the paper they find it difficult to keep focused. As a result of this problem, they find it more time consuming and harder. Simsek (2008) also found that some students prefer paper-pencil exams rather than online ones since they feel more stressed during online exams. Aykac (2005) indicates that although the students have positive attitudes towards computers they rarely use it for language learning purposes. Furthermore, the students are aware of the potential benefits of using computers as a means of learning a new language; however, this awareness does not lead them to utilize computers for learning English. Tuncok (2010), on the other hand, found that the attitudes and competency levels of teachers influence the students' attitude as well. This finding marks the idea that the students want to see competent computer users as their teachers.

4.4. Suggestions

Identification of the problems is only meaningful if the problems are somehow solved. All the studies selected for examining teachers' attitudes come to the conclusion that EFL teachers need training courses on technology and how to use the technology for language teaching purposes. The number of studies providing detailed insight on addressing the problems is fewer, although almost all the studies indicated the problems. Hismanoglu (2010) states the suggestions of the EFL teachers in Turkey. The main suggestion is implementing training facilities for teachers. If the teachers have training in technology and how to implement it for language teaching purposes than the rate of using computers will increase. Second suggestion is the curriculum change. The lack of curriculum compatible with computer use puts extra burden on teachers' shoulders. This may be the reason why teachers with computer skills are hesitant to make use of CALL in their classes. Lastly, in order to increase the

accessible computers in language learning environment, the teachers suggest that private or government funding should be provided. Kulekci (2009), too, states that 80% of teachers think that there should be a training program for EFL teachers. Top (2007) supports the solutions stated above. The problems stated by the students are addressed in Simsek (2008) and Aykac (2005). Simsek (2008) points out that as the students are not totally comfortable with having an online reading class there should be a balance in implementing computers. The study suggests that face-to-face education and ICT based courses should go hand in hand. Aykac (2005), on the other hand, points out that although the students have positive attitudes they hardly use computers for language learning purposes. Hence, the study suggests that students, too, need training on how to use computers for learning a foreign language.

5. Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of determining the attitudes of teachers and students towards CALL in Turkey. Within the scope of this study the problems related to computer use in English as a foreign language in Turkey were also examined. The studies selected were limited in number (n=10); however, they provided valuable information. This reveals that the students and teachers have positive attitudes towards CALL; however, the teachers are reluctant to utilize computers in their classes. One of the main problems is the lack of efficient teacher training on technology and how to employ technology into English teaching process. The teachers suggested that they have low confidence in trying new technological tools in their teaching process, although the majority of them have positive opinions about the potential benefits of CALL. Students, too, want to have English teachers that are competent enough to integrate computers to their lessons. Tuncok (2010) suggests that as the age of the students decrease, the demand for learning English with computers increases. With this in mind, it would not be wrong to say that in the near future, we will face a generation that requests English lessons to be taught with recent technological tools. Another problem encountered was the insufficient number of technological devices in schools. The teachers and the authors suggest that the number should be increased for effective CALL utilization. Lastly, the majority of the studies focused on the need for compatible curriculum design. Having a curriculum going hand in hand with computer use will decrease the workload of the teachers and increase their motivation and ambition to use computers in their lessons. By addressing some of the issues blockading the use of computers in language teaching and learning contexts, the study gives a general insight on the current state of CALL in Turkey. Since the teachers and the students have positive attitudes, they should be motivated and encouraged to use recent technology in teaching and learning English.

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