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Teachers’ attitudes to and motivations for using CALL in and around the language classroom

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Abstract

This paper examines teachers’ attitudes to and motivations for using CALL. It also looks at teachers’ perceptions of student motivation when using CALL as part of a class. Most teachers who took part in the study use CALL because they are intrinsically motivated to do so, rather than due to institutional pressure. There was a general consensus from the teachers that they wanted to use computers more in their classes, particularly for using computers to do more interesting and engaging learner-centred activities. It was also linked to the availability of varied and rich authentic texts online. Many of the teachers believed CALL activities could be more motivating for students.

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Keywords: CALL; motivation; teachers’ attitudes to CALL; teacher cognition

1. Introduction

The relationship between globalization and ICT is not a coincidental one, which puts CALL in a central position when we look at language learning in the modern world. CALL theory and practice now has a fifty-year history in which it has struggled to keep pace with new technologies. The idea of CALL being driven by technology has led to calls for a more grounded and theoretical approach (Levy, 1997; Kessler, 2006; Beatty, 2003) and in particular an approach which is rooted in second language acquisition (SLA) theories (Chapelle, 2001). However, SLA theories are already rather diversified, without a unified single approach (Mitchell & Myles, 2004: 2). CALL is an interdisciplinary field, taking important concepts from SLA, educational technology, artificial intelligence, computational linguistics and applied

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linguistics (Chapelle, 2001; Beatty, 2003: 1-2). Add to this the fact that SLA and applied linguistics are themselves interdisciplinary and it becomes clear that CALL is a multi-interdisciplinary field. This is an important feature when we are considering CALL from a teacher’s perspective. This paper will look at teachers’ attitudes to using CALL and their motivations for doing so, in particular the question of why teachers use CALL. Due to the importance of ICT in the developed world, it was hypothesised that teachers would feel that using CALL was more motivating for students. This will be examined in the present study, along with the link between teacher and student motivation.

2. Method

The interviews were conducted with teachers at a private English language school in London. Most of the students at the school come from developed countries and are aged between 18 and 28, although there are some younger and older students. The school has two well-equipped multimedia labs which are available for teaching purposes, and a strong emphasis on self-access and autonomy for which the use of computers is encouraged. The interviews were conducted a few weeks before the introduction of interactive whiteboards (IWBs) which the teachers had recently been informed about. Three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the school, the fourth using Skype chat. This was partially due to time constraints both on myself and the interviewee. All the names of participants have been changed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>CELTA DELTA and doing MA (Bilingualism)</td>
<td>Taught TOEFL iBT for several terms. Invigilated fortnightly online simulation test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>New Zealander</td>
<td>6+ years</td>
<td>CELTA and doing MA (unrelated to EFL)</td>
<td>Taught on EAP courses on pre-sessional university placement scheme. Used CALL a lot for his lessons and then decided not to based on grievances with facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>9+ years</td>
<td>CELTA</td>
<td>Teaches business and exam preparation classes. Attended a recent conference in which many of the talks related to teaching business with technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kat</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>CELTA, DELTA, MA (unrelated field)</td>
<td>Member of many online communities. Lived abroad and maintains contact with friends online. Very active on the Internet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Interview participants’ biographical information

There was also a questionnaire which was submitted to five online mailing lists, two of which were CALL specific. There were 174 respondents in total, 155 of whom (89.1%) completed the questionnaire in full. There was a good range of ages and over 24 different linguistic backgrounds. One surprising aspect was the relatively high ratings of digital literacy (see Figure 2\textit{Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.}) and the number of respondents who had taken a course in instructional technology (52%). This may suggest a skewed sample because of the nature of the online mailing lists, but it might also reflect the nature of CALL penetration around the world. Further study would be needed to come to any solid conclusions.

\footnote{Test of English as a Foreign Language (Internet Based Test).}
3. Conclusions

Many of the teachers from the study viewed CALL as another tool at their disposal. As Levy (1997: 178) explains with the tutor-tool framework, this view of CALL helps to address issues of methodology and curriculum implementation. In other words, teachers are able to fit CALL easily into their current practice in line with their beliefs about teaching. It seems that most teachers use CALL because they are intrinsically motivated to do so, or they see the pedagogic value of using it. This could be for the authenticity CALL can provide, the opportunities for more student-centred classes and the autonomy of computer-based tasks, both in class and as a self-access resource, or the way that CALL fits in with the teacher’s own personal views about teaching (cf. Lam, 2000). Another source of teachers’ intrinsic motivation to use CALL could be the relevance they ascribe it to their students and the modern world. Although some respondents reported a sense of pressure to use CALL, this was not always seen as negative. In fact, there was a link between using CALL and professional development, and as such it was
seen as being highly beneficial to both students and teachers. Some highly proficient CALL users actually wanted to increase their students’ digital literacy as well as language aptitude. As many of the teachers I spoke to for this study expressed a personal desire to use computers more in their teaching, which was not related to external pressure but a complex number of reasons, the strongest of which seemed to be intrinsic motivation, this shows a link to the Self-Determination Theory as proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and its importance to teacher motivation.

In addition, the general consensus from the study was that teachers do feel that using CALL is more motivating for students than simply employing books and whiteboards. This is because it is perceived as being more relevant to them, more engaging and more authentic. As Peacock (1997) found, authentic tasks are more motivating for students. Thus, as the teachers from this study generally felt CALL tasks to be more authentic or allow for greater authenticity, this is likely to be a motivating factor. So it seems that my initial hypothesis that teachers would believe CALL was more motivating for students than traditional classroom materials was correct. In my original hypothesis, I felt that this would be related to the importance of ICT in society, and the theme of relevance and authenticity were very influential factors for using CALL for the teachers in this study. In addition, the study revealed that student motivation was an important factor of the teachers’ own motivation levels. This demonstrates the link between student and teacher motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). However, we must be wary of teachers’ perceptions of their students’ feelings: as Wiebe and Kabata (2010) point out, teachers are not always able to accurately judge their students’ use of CALL applications. Despite this, I think that this finding is useful in highlighting the role of student motivation in teacher cognition, an area in which further research would be useful.

One of the useful insights that came from the study was regarding the close relationship between student and teacher motivation. At least for the interview participants, the students’ perception of CALL was highly influential in their own decisions about using it. This is a complicated relationship and one which would also benefit from further study. Although these findings were only related to the opinions of teachers and their perception of CALL and personal motivation as teachers, the results from both the interviews and the questionnaires collected seem to show a strong conceptual link between CALL and motivation in general, as well as student and teacher motivation.

References


